Mosurre

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Mosurre

by EmthelRackem

Summary

Will's days of translating are behind him, but Jack is insistent that he's the only one who can help them on their expedition. Now Will is finding himself separated from modern life, with a chief who appears to be very interested in him and a slowly unraveling set of morals.

Notes

Hello! I'm dipping my toes into the Hannibal fandom pool, which includes the usual dubious morals. I promise, promise, that my writing gets better as the chapters go on, this has been written over a long period of time, and is still being worked on so I'm still improving! I have a question to ask of anyone who speaks other languages, I ran these words through google translate and nothing came up, but if anyone recognizes them please let me know and I'll change them. The words I'll use are Aknorra, Mosurre, Tume and Ulima, but if they mean anything in any other language let me know!
Also, "English" and *not English*

Chapter 1

Will's life was fine, thank you very much. He was working with boats, he was cooking for himself, he was caring for dogs, and he was not letting Jack rope him into some stupid expedition.

Or at least, trying not to.

Jack was pushing all his buttons. His 'saving people' button, his 'using your gifts' button, and the 'you studied language for years, why if not for this moment?' button which was the most annoying and rusted over one. A hard button to push effectively, but he was pushing it.

Yes, when he left the police academy he went into language. Words and intent from other languages came easily to him and yes, it was because of his empathy. But he left for a reason. He didn't want to spend his life in that department. So he picked up where he left off in the police business and he started studying forensics. He was hoping to be a teacher, which is why he's attempting to shoot Jack down.

"This is an incredible discovery, Will, and an amazing chance at research," Jack says, almost cornering Will against a wall, "you've studied their language."

"We've only just found their society," Will points out, "I don't know anything about them."

"You excelled at similar languages, your empathy will be a massive advantage when trying to build friendly communication."

"Or it could concern them and my inexperience with the language could insult them. I'm not going to risk it."

"I'm willing to take those risks," Jack huffs, "you're the best we've got."

Will waves his arm to the side in a grand sweep. "Then find another, I'm done with that kind of thing."

"We don't have another. If you don't join; this expedition is a failure and a lost civilisation will remain lost."

"What if they want to remain lost?"

"We don't know that unless you're there to ask them." Jack's voice has risen to a near yell, but he manages to reign it in again, "will you deprive them of the opportunity to tell us that because you're too stubborn to accept the job?"

Will works his jaw, thinking through his options. He could ignore it, go about his life like before, study to be a forensic investigator and then get turned away, or he could do something he's good at, be accepted into a job easily and have a solid foundation for his next ventures. He sighs and hangs his head, and Jack sees it for what it is. Admitting defeat.

“I’ll pick you up tomorrow,” Jack offers, “introduce you to the team.”

“Yeah, see you then,” Will says back, clearly dismissing him and turning away.

When he meets with the team he is not in better spirits. They meet in a sophisticated research lab, bones and pottery lining the walls. A few pictures of the society, pieces of their culture. Everything is shiny and new, but it reminds Will more of a forensic lab than a new cultural discovery centre.

The team don’t look anything like him, a scraggly bearded fisherman from nowhere. They look professional, refined even as they bounce around.

“This is Will Graham,” Jack introduces, “he’s our language expert.”

“Hi, I’m Beverly,” a woman comes up and says, her hair tied back professionally and a pair of goggles on her face, “I do the clothes,” she shakes his hand, then sweeps a wide gesture around the room, “Jimmy Price is the old man over there who does funeral culture and Brian Zeller does the other varied bits and pieces.” Brian and Jimmy look over, both of them bent over a cracked pot, and wave.

“We’re also with Peter, who specialises in the animal side of things,” Jack explains, “he’s not here right now.”

“He’ll join us for the expedition,” Price cuts in knocking a bit of pot to search around it.

“We’re heading out soon,” Jack says, directing Will around to a stack of papers, “better start researching.”

And so he does. He looks through the written language, comparing it to it’s closest relative. He scours through the information presented, compares similar languages to build up a base of sound in his head. He structures simple sentences, tries to separate the formal and informal language. He sequesters himself in a corner of the room and practises speaking simple sentences.

He goes to Beverly at one point, asking about a piece of clothing.

“It’s a ceremonial robe,” she points out, “we’ve only found bits and pieces of them, never the full thing.”

“For what ceremony?” Will asks, looking over at the scraps of fabric, pieces of gold and silver.

“We think it’s coming of age, according to Zeller. Price can’t find it during burials though.”

“The words related to it are similar to birth or making,” Will murmurs, “so that makes sense.”

He wants to feel the cloth, but refrains, letting the issue lie while he goes back over the language. He doesn’t feel ready, but Jack is pushing them to leave by the end of the week. He resigns himself to asking the people of their language, he could learn it better from them.

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Will makes his way to the take-off area at 5 am, a coffee in his hand and a backpack on his back. He organised with the nearest Dog Hotel for his pack and was ready for his expedition. He'll miss them, but the carers are good and have promised to call him if there are any troubles.

Beverly is there at the building, another cup nestled in her hands to try and keep her warm. She's got a duffle bag at her feet, a dark green with a few trinkets hanging off it. She grins at Will and waves him over.

"Hey," she greets, "Zeller and Price just zipped inside, and Jack's in there with Peter and Mason."

"Mason?" Will asks, "Is he coming with us?"

"He's the lead benefactor, paid for our ride over," Beverly explains, taking a sip out of her cup and picking up her bag, "don't know if he's coming, but I hope not."

Will huffs in amusement, following Beverly as she enters the building and leads him through the corridors to a waiting room, where a few familiar and not so familiar faces are. Price and Zeller are easy to pick out, though they've changed into more appropriate clothes for the outdoors rather than the lab coat and glasses they've been in for the time Will has seen them.

Then there are two other men. One is hunched over slightly, clothes dark and muddy. It looks like fur on his pants, but thicker than Will's dog hairs so he's assuming its horsehair. The other man is dressed in a suit, a red pocket square poking out and Will refuses to meet his eyes. He can see why Beverly wouldn't want him, Mason, coming on the trip.

"Will, this is Peter," Jack introduces, keeping a respectable distance, "and this is our benefactor and partner, Mason."

Will holds out a hand for Mason to shake, and he does with a smile that unsettles Will. "You're the empathy guy," Mason deduces with a smirk, "where they pull you from?"

"I'm the language specialist," Will corrects sharply.

"Huh," Mason deflects, already turning away to face the rest of the room, "you're flight is taking off in 10, I've got a meeting but I'll be popping in to check on your expedition in say, a week?" He grins, opening his arms like he's displaying a set, "see you then."

Then he walks out, flicking sunglasses down onto his face as he leaves through the door and doesn't look back. Will doesn't mind, instead falling back into step beside Beverly who's making a face into her cup. She reaches out to clap a reassuring hand on Will's shoulder but stops when Will tenses.

"Oh, sorry man," she says, taking a swig of her drink, "although, now you know why I was braving the weather, anything's better than that asshole."

Will hums, tipping his head in gentle agreement and taking a sip as well. The crew double-check their belongings, pack the extra nutrition bars and water bottles, and ensure everyone has a first aid kit that's properly filled before making their way out to the helicopter.

It's massive, like a military one. It will easily fit them and their equipment, their tents and cameras. There are metal cars from a removed gun, the ground unsteady there. The doors roll all the way back, but the vehicle probably hasn't seen war. Will vaguely ponders the implications of bringing a military aircraft to a peaceful expedition but decides not to let his mind stay there.

They load up, holding on to the handholds as the pilot lifts them off the ground and into the air. The flight takes around an hour, so they all settle in for the long haul. Will flicks open his language book, slowly working his way through translating one of his childhood favourites into their language. (Some would say that collections of art histories were not really childhood reading, but Will only really had the libraries and the art section was the quietest.)

Beverly settles into a rambunctious game of Uno with Jimmy and Brian, the trio fighting with the helicopter blades to hear each other. Peter gravitates towards Will, his calmness, and just sits there. He doesn't ask any questions, and so Will doesn't feel the need to answer them. It's the nicest silence he's ever been in with someone.

Then they get closer, and Beverly eagerly goes over to the window.

"This forest is thick," she exclaims, "no wonder they weren't found."

"Just satellite images," Brian huffs. He nudges Bev out of the way of the window, peeking down at the forest and catching sight of the corner of a building.

"We're landing quite a way out," Jack calls out to the cabin, "sit down and get ready."

The group rushes to hold on as the helicopter hits the ground hard. Will's pen clatters to the ground, but he manages to pick it up and tuck it back into his bag. The doors open and everyone piles out and grabs their own bags, the pilot not leaving his chair.

"Got everything?" Jack calls, "because we aren't coming back here." Everyone calls back affirmatives, and the group moves out, hearing the helicopter whirl away as soon as their out of range. The sound is deafening, but Will keeps his wits about him, moving forward with the group and pushing through the forest.

Then he hears footsteps, a rustle to his left that drives the group slightly sideways, and another in front that forces Jack back a pace. He knows they're being herded away, but he also knows that any violence could destroy their entire expedition.

Then a handful of people step out in front of them, clearly they're armed forces. Knives and spears, with one of them wearing a colourful covering made of fur. He looks like a predator, like something that would usually be a solitary killer, and Will feels flayed under his gaze. Jack defers to him, the one who looks to be in power, raising his hands in a show of surrender.

Greetings, Will stumbles over the spoken language, *we come only peacefully.*

Greetings, the leader repeats, a hint of amusement as he pronounces the word, *if you come peacefully, why have you come?* The question throws Will for a second, words stumbling into each other. He repeats it in English for Jack.

“Tell him we’re here to learn,” Jack commands, lowering his hands.

We are looking to educate us, Will translates carefully.

Your leader refuses to speak with me? The man asks.

He cannot speak, Will assures, *I speak only little.*

The man hums artfully, and Will can’t help but notice light catch on his chiselled cheekbones, *Well, come then. I am Hannibal, the Aknorra, and these are my troops.* The threat is not implied, it’s clearly said in the words he doesn’t speak, so Will ensures he doesn’t step out of line.

Ak Hannibal, Will greets, *I am Will, this is my herd.* He motions for Jack to introduce himself, making sure he uses the title. Aknorra doesn’t have a proper translation that Will can see, it’s somewhere between chief and god. Hannibal seems to get the gist of the conversation, even as it’s in English, and the others introduce themselves in a similar fashion.

Hannibal then leads them through the forest, the warriors flanking them. Each person is adorned with furs, bones shaped into pendants, Beverly looks excited at the tops and pants they wear, the fabric stiffer than their own. Will jogs slightly to stay just behind Jack, who is following at Hannibal’s heel. If a conversation strikes up Will doesn’t want to let Jack try alone.

Then they cross through the last patch of forest, a society filling up their vision. Buildings, a mixture of permanent and moveable, stand in front of them, people rush around, noting the stranger’s presence but attending to other matters. Only a few children look truly concerned, but reassurances of their parents keep them at bay. It’s a testament to their strength that they do not look frightened.

Hannibal leads them towards the centre structure, a palace or a pyramid, Will cannot tell. The architecture is unique, built high but with careful carvings in the sides. It’s wonderful, something beautiful. They are taken to one of the lower rooms in the structure, a table sitting in the centre.

“Brian, there are books!” Jimmy exclaims, “and their cutlery is unique.”

“Can you ask them about the robes?” Beverly breaths to Will.

You are here to learn, Hannibal says, ignoring the chattering around him, *as a gesture of good faith we have brought you here to discuss.*

Thank you, Will offers back, casting a look at Jack as he translates, and then translates back Jack’s reply. *We offer our own teachings in exchange. Jack asks if we can live for

nights and days?*

Stay as needed, Hannibal assures, *tonight we can hold a feast for you, introduce you.* He stops, thinking over a thought as it passes through him before asking, *are you the only one that we can speak to us?*

Will tenses, he knows he isn't fluent and it's probably as hard for them to understand him as it is for him, *yes, we speak another together, but only I can speak little with you.*

Would you be averse to meeting me after the feast? I will be able to introduce you to some of our teachers, Hannibal suggests. Will wants to feel insulted, he graduated school and certainly doesn't need a teacher to point out his flaws, but at the same time, he needs to know more of the language if only to communicate better.

He agrees and spends the next hour carefully translating questions and answers between the two groups. Several times, Hannibal answers too vaguely or with such confusing language that Will has to ask for clarification, but sometimes he declines to answer their question altogether with the promise of information at a later date.

As Will becomes more tired, his mental and social batteries almost completely run down, Hannibal gently shows them to their rooms and gives them the time for the dinner. They also get introduced to several other important personnel, with Gideon and Tobias being assigned to them. Will isn't sure if this is protection for them or the people but he doesn't mind, instead setting his bag on the ground and falling onto the bed.

The material is nice, pillows stuffed with something incredibly soft and the mattress supportive but not hard. There's a shelf near the bed, empty like the makeshift dresser, and Will thinks of putting his clothes there but is too tired to try. He settles for letting his eyes close and passing the time until he is awoken for the feast.

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The feast is presented along many tables. There are people dancing, Hannibal is adorned in glittering jewellery, and a fire roars near the centre of the city. Everyone sits together, Will and his group being seated near the head of the table. It's not a slanted one but separated near the middle with one half being visibly elevated. Will and his party are not on that half, but Hannibal sits near the break so they are still close.

The food is a mixture of meat and vegetables, platters being passed up and down the table as people grab what they want. Empty platters are simply placed on the ground to leave room on the table. The scent and taste of the food is unusual for everyone, something not tasted ever before.

Peter seems distracted during the meal, and Will doesn't understand why until a dog comes over and sniffs at his legs. Will takes a quick glance under the table to see some pets milling around, delighting children and licking up plates. He reaches down to pet the dog's head and lets it go when it decides to run off again.

Are you finding the food to your liking? Hannibal asks, gesturing to Will's plate.

It is good, Ak Hannibal, Will praises, *who does the roasting?*

I do, along with some assistants when we create meals such as this, Hannibal explains, *I assume you have nothing like this?*

“What’s he saying?” Jack hisses from Will’s other side, “never mind, ask him about the ingredients.”

No, we have nothing like this, Will translates, *Jack is asking about the meat and plants that go into this.*

Most are native, or from our farms, Hannibal explains, *we eat a lot of pork.*

“Most of it is farmed,” Will explains to Jack, “some native foods as well.”

“Ask him if we can see where he gets the produce, Brian will probably be interested,” Jack demands lightly, scooping up some more meat for himself while Will does so.

Tomorrow morning we can show you the farms, as well as take you to our experts, Hannibal suggests. He gently instructs someone further down the table about the plans, before turning back to the meal. Will relays the information and Jack huffs in agreement, already turning to the rest of the group.

When the meal is finished, a sweet pudding is handed around. It comes in cups, a white piece with the consistency of thick cream. It’s sweet, but not overly so and there are extras around the table that people sprinkle on. Hannibal tells him it’s to enhance the flavour or change it to be more desirable, as he puts a sprinkle of red on his own. Will prefers it as it is, mimicking the movements of others at the table as he gently and carefully eats it.

Once the meal is done and all the dishes have been licked clean (either by people or by the dogs), Hannibal stands. He welcomes the strangers and alerts everyone of their presence before also noting the crew who helped him cook and prepare. While at a high school this speech would result in shouting and mass whispers, at the table there is respectful nodding and polite applause. It reminds Will of an opera. Then everyone stands to leave. Some linger around or stay to clean up platters, but most return to their houses.

Would you care to join me? Hannibal asks, *for your language.*

“Oh sure,” Will says, startled, before slipping into the language, *Yes. Do I follow?*

Come, I have books for you. Hannibal stands, and Will follows. Jack gives him a look but Will waves him off, telling him he’s just learning. He follows Hannibal as they climb up the pyramid structure. Will can now see it has two levels, one which has a large platform and table and then the higher level. Hannibal doesn’t lead him to the top, but to just below the outcropping level, to a room with a collection of tomes much larger than the previous.

Will looks around happily, admiring the books around the room and being lead to a collection of chairs. Hannibal sits in one and gestures for Will to sit across from him. He does so, noting the soft material, similar to the mattress of his bed.

Ak Hannibal, you said teacher? Will asks, as there is no one with them.

I thought you might appreciate fewer strangers, you seemed uncomfortable at dinner. Will hadn't been aware of it, but apparently, Hannibal had noticed his stiffness, the fact that he avoided talking to or looking at people.

Thank you, Will hums, *I know my speak is not good, and you are working.*

I am always happy to help someone better themselves, Hannibal says, *especially when they are trying so hard.*

Will huffs a laugh under his breath, *Trying, I do not have teacher.*

Now you have me, Hannibal assures, *and I can help. Do you have a preference for where to start?*

Anywhere! My speak is not good, start anywhere, Will says, feeling embarrassed with every out of place word he says.

Firstly, you say 'speak' instead of language, which is a simple fix, Hannibal says gently, *and your words are more traditional.*

I'm out of the time, Will humphs, *is what you're saying.*

It's refreshing, a stretch of my mind.

Annoying, you think.

Hannibal smiles, a curled sharp smirk against his cheek, *you're effort is admirable, and the faults are easy to remedy. It is nice of you to try and learn our language instead of forcing yours upon us.* Hannibal stands, pulling a book from the shelf and coming over to pass it over to Will.

I can read, Will protests, *I learnt from reading.*

But this is more current reading, your texts are probably old, are they not? Hannibal almost purrs, leaning down over him.

Yes, Will allows, *and I can not pronounce words in readings.*

I will read to you, Hannibal pulls a chair over, lifting it easily off the ground so there is no scraping sound against the floor, *if you allow me?*

Thank you, Will passes the book over, and Hannibal tilts it slightly as he begins to read. The words are complex, it's not a children's book and for that Will is thankful. It showcases history and art of the culture, some pieces Hannibal points out in the room. Will stays in the chair until his eyes cannot stay open any longer, and Hannibal closes the book gently.

Class is over, he hums gently, *would you like me to lead you to your room?*

Yes, Will mumbles, standing on tired feet, *the doors are such the same.* Hannibal leads him out and down the stairs, keeping a respectful distance but reaching out a steadying hand when Will stumbles. The guards at the doors bow and let them through, and Will slouches over to his door.

Uh, good night, Will says, awkwardly pushing his hand against the door.

Good night, Hannibal returns, nodding slightly before turning away. Once he gets the door open, Will slumps down onto his bed, resolving himself to rummaging through his bag in the morning to get clean clothes. He drifts off and dreams of artworks without names.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

A trip to see how the food is prepared, and nothing suspicious happens.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beverly is lucky that when she comes barging into his room Will has already gotten dressed. He feels stiff from the grime, but he's gone longer without showers and in worse accommodation.

"Come on," Beverly insists, "we can't go out without you."

"Go where?" Will asks, rubbing his eye as he ties his boots.

"To see the farms," she says, gently prodding the door frame when it creaks, "did you forget? You kind of planned the whole thing."

"Jack organised it," he replies, stretching out his back, "I'm just the messenger."

"Yeah, yeah, you still have to come." She waits until Will shakes himself and leaves the room, grabbing his smallest bag and dumping his water bottle in it. They walk side by side, noting the slight change in attitudes of the people around them. It's still indifference, but every now and again someone side eyes them, watching and waiting for something to happen. Will ignores them, used to it, and walks up to the rest of his crew who are hanging awkwardly around a group of farmers.

Good morning, Will greets.

Good morning, one of the women returns, cloth top and pants, with a string of colourful beads around her waist, *Ak Hannibal asked us to show you our farms, and then take you into the forest.*

Thank you, Will says, hastily translating for Jack. They are led to some farm patches, ones where fruits and vegetables grow, and even a smaller patch for flowers. Some, the guide explains, are medicinal but some are purely for decoration purposes.

The flowers are in interesting shades, dark reds and bright whites. There are yellows, pinks and blues, but the vast majority are a deep maroon. It reminds Will of funeral flowers, although Jimmy assures him they don't appear in too many sources he's found.

Then, they are brought to the animals. There are a few pigs, cows, chickens, normal farm animals. They are well cared for, as the guide explains.

“Can I touch them?” Peter pipes up, startling Will, “can you ask?”

Can we interact with them? Will translates to their makeshift guide.

The animals? The guide repeats, startled, *yes, let me just-* They call out to one of the farmers in the pen, and a fast hushed conversation takes place. Then the farmer sits on the fence, straddling it and motioning for them.

Up and over, they say, *be careful with the younger ones.*

“You can go over the fence,” Will explains to Peter, “be gentle though.”

Peter hops up easily, gentling placing his feet on the floor and staying calm as the animals crowd around him. There’s a chicken that seems particularly interested. Will, instead of jumping directly, holds his hand over the fence edge so the animals can sniff him. It reminds him warmly of the dogs he saw the night prior, and the ones he left behind.

For a society that feeds mostly on pigs, at least, according to Hannibal, there isn’t a vastly different number of them. The pigs don’t have larger paddocks or more food, and there are more chickens and small birds pottering around then there are pigs. Maybe most were eaten last night, but surely a society of such wealth and obvious intelligence wouldn’t kill all their livestock for strangers.

He wants to ask but refrains as Jack looks antsy to find out about the forest. Will can only imagine what’s going through his head, thoughts of how normal everything is, the fact that farming is boring, so on and so forth.

So Will retracts his hand and asks their guide to see the forest.

There is not many interesting things out here, the guide explains, *we gather fruit when needed, but otherwise we can take care of ourselves.*

Why not grow them here? Will asks, *if it is only few?*

They’re easy to find, it’s not hard to travel and see them, the guide reaches out and snags a berry from a nearby plant, passing it over for Will to inspect. He does so, noting the dark blue, almost navy, of the fruit, before passing it over to Jack.

“Is it poisonous?” Jack asks, rolling the fruit between his fingers, “ask her if we can eat it.”

These are toxins? Will asks, *can we eat them?*

They are fine to eat, I will show you the poisonous one’s if we see them, the guide assures, plucking another and putting it in her mouth to demonstrate. Jack carefully eats his, humming at the texture and taste.

“Is it good?” Beverly asks, studying the bush and taking a berry for herself.

“It’s a fruit,” Jack deflects, “like a blueberry.” Beverly frowns, eating one herself and letting Jimmy and Brian take one too. She passes one to Will, who carefully chews on it. It’s sweet, but not too much, much like the dessert from last night. The texture is soft, and Will can imagine himself using this with ice-cream back home in a fancier dessert.

As they venture further in, they meet a group of people on horseback, the horses modern and easily recognisable as escaped, or free, farm animals. There are a few colourful birds lain across the backs of the horse, killed most likely by bow and arrow or the daggers decorating their belts.

Hello, the guide calls, *these are Ak Hannibal’s guests, we are showing them how we get our food.*

Oh, hello, one of the hunters' replies, *I thought you would be more interested in our history, why do you want to know about our food?* The question is directed at the group as a whole and Will hurries to translate.

“We’re just learning as much as we can,” Beverly supplies before Jack can open his mouth, “can you tell them we’re just trying to learn?”

We just want to educate ourselves as far as possible, Will explains, *leader Jack asked to visit food after the feast.*

You’ve visited us, the hunter says, displaying his arms wildly, *we hunt like anyone else.*

“Can I pet their horses?” Peter asks, looking over them, “Fur feels different if treated differently.”

“Sure,” Will says, slightly off-balance but not letting it show, *can we interact with the horses?*

Yes you can ‘interact’ with the horses. They are well trained. The hunter laughs as Will translates, and he hopes the group doesn’t notice the tenseness in his shoulders. Peter slides over to the lead hunter’s horse, gently running his hand over the horse's nose. Will’s eyes flick away, letting him have his moment, and land on one of the surrounding’s hunters.

He’s watching Peter intensely, the movements he makes towards the horse. He seems ready for something, but when he sees Will he straightens and relaxes. His pose becomes more neutral and he pointedly turns his attention to a different task.

“What are you thinking?” Jack asks Peter, nodding at the continual petting motion.

“Good brushwork,” Peter comments, “well cared for. I wonder how long they work?”

How much do the horses move? Will asks, turning to the horse’s rider.

A lot? The rider answers, confused by the strange question, *as much as normal horses?* There’s a glance between the rider and another, both obviously confused and amused.

How much do they, uh, work, Will hastily corrects himself, *In a day and night.*

Oh, the rider says, *they work as much as they want to. There is not a lot for them to do, so most of the time the work is simple and the horses see it as fun.* He leans over to ruffle the top of the mane, the horse huffing playfully but staying mostly still.

“They don’t do a lot of work, just what is needed,” Will tells Peter, who hums under his breath. He strokes the nose a few more times before stepping back and getting ready to move on. The guide waves goodbye to the riders, who manage their horses skilfully around the group. Will notices the particular rider twist his head to catch another glimpse of Peter but dismisses it mentally. He has no space for that in his mind, too focused on the language.

“Seems like you’re not the only one with an Aztec admirer,” Beverly teases, nudging Will as they are led a bit deeper in the forest.

“What?” Will questions, “Aztec admirer?”

“I mean, they’re kind of Aztecs,” she says, shrugging, “and don’t tell me you didn’t see how ‘Ak Hannibal’ looks at you.” The guide looks over at the familiar name but doesn’t seem too interested.

“What?” Will asks again, “Okay, no. That’s not- he just teaches me the language.”

“The leader of the society decided to personally teach you the language?” She raises her eyebrows, sceptical, “yeah right. He wants to get in your pants.”

“Who wants to get in Will’s pants?” Jimmy asks, finally deciding to listen in.

Will glares at them both, “no one.”

“The chief, Hannibal,” Beverly explains, grinning, “and good on you, he’s hot.”

“I’m not having this conversation,” Will deflects, making his way quickly back to the front of the group and escaping his companions’ laughter. The guide looks at him but his blush probably prevents her from mentioning their conversation. She simply keeps going until they reach a wider clearing, not too far from the village, definitely not where the riders were hunting.

This is where we collect most of the fruit that we can’t grow, sometimes children will come here and pick them, so I’m sure you can too, the guide explains, *avoid the white ones, they can be poisonous in large amounts.*

“She says we can pick fruit here if we want, just to avoid the white ones,” Will translates, then directs to her, *is there a carrier for them?*

Only pick what you can carry in your hands, the guide explains, *we already picked many for you last night, let the bushes rest.*

“Don’t pick too many,” Will tells his group, “only what you can carry.” It’s a moot point because Brian has already gathered a handful, popping berries into his mouth like they’re candies. To be fair the brightly coloured fruits are small enough and strange enough that they

could be mistaken for hard candies, or little jelly-filled ones Will would pick up every now and again when he felt down.

There's a few he recognises from the night prior, the red ones and purple ones being toppings on dishes, while the yellow was somehow incorporated into one of the vegetable dishes he saw passed around. He goes for that one first, gently separating it from the bush and eating it. Its texture reminds him of a tomato, but the flavour is slightly off and the seeds are mostly nonexistent.

It's amazing that they've developed an entirely new ecosystem, everything slightly to the left of what he knows. The sweeter berries are much the same, the red one resembles a strawberry in all but shape, instead more of an oval than the usual triangle. The purple ones look like blackberries, but inside is a pit that he has to spit out. It's a strange reality, and Will enjoys the newness.

Once everyone has eaten a handful, as well as taking a few to bring back to their rooms for research, the guide takes them back to the village, explaining the details of the fruit they had just eaten.

Sometimes, she says as they climb over a tree root, *Ak Hannibal will put white berries in the food, for flavour. It is so little, but the taste is evident. You will always know when there is some in there, but never seek it out in its purest form. Then it becomes addictive.*

Is it addictive or toxins? Will asks, grateful to see the village come into sight, *or does the addictive hurt you?*

They are poisonous, is all the guide says, *addictive and harmful. Only the pigs eat them.*

Then why does Ak Hannibal put them in food? If only for pigs?

Diluted, he puts them in after diluting them, the guide reminds, *if you have them in pure form, you will be killed.*

Will frowns, wanting to ask more, but they are already at the village and the guide excuses herself to get back to work. He doesn't want to inconvenience her anymore and so he lets it go, instead turning his attention to Jack.

Jack's got his arms folded, looking around at the bustling village and deciding where to go next. Eventually, he sighs, and glances at his team, full and sated but also tired from the hours sent walking and exploring.

"Go take a break, meet back up before dinner. We can talk to the chief and figure out some more day plans," he declares, waving his hand to dismiss them. Beverly, Jimmy and Brian dash off to their rooms, probably to sleep off their feast or to play another loud round of UNO. Peter wanders back over to the farm area, probably to see the animals and take a closer look at the way everything works. Will is happy to let him go by himself, safe in the knowledge that Peter probably won't annoy anyone like the rest of the group, and even Will finds him easy to be around.

He takes a few steps towards his room and is promptly interrupted by one of his guards.

Follow me, Ak Hannibal wants to speak with you, the man says. Will thinks he's Tobias, although he was so tired last night names had escaped it.

Did he say why? Will asks.

Same reason as last night, I suppose, Tobias remarks, leading Will up the side of the pyramid. He feels watched by the singing people, their heads turning to catch him as makes his way up to the library room as last night.

Ak Hannibal, Tobias greets, bowing slightly.

Good afternoon, Hannibal returns, moving his attention away from the paper in front of him and turning it towards the pair, *thank you for bringing Will here.* It's a dismissal, and so Tobias leaves, his movement more of a slither than anything else.

Good afternoon, Ak Hannibal, Will parrots, *why did I come here?*

I wanted to apologise for not coming with you to the farms, Hannibal admits as he stands, *I was caught up in reports this morning, unfortunately.*

Oh, no worries, Will assures, *the guide was smart, she showed us farm and forest.*

I assume you met Abigail? Hannibal asks.

Brown hair, colourful waist necklace? Will asks, *she didn't tell us her name.*

Her belt shows off her prowess as a hunter, Hannibal remarks, *something her father taught her, to honour all pieces of the kill. She has put herself into the craft though, improved upon it. She is almost ready to be an artist.* Will is thrown by the confusing language, and Hannibal takes advantage of it, stalking through the room and pulling a book off the shelf, *speaking of improving, would you like to join me again tonight?*

Jack wants to speak with you, to ask about more learning, Will says, *otherwise, it would be good to learn.*

What does Jack want to learn about? Hannibal asks, *he seems to not have a plan, simply demanding answers to questions he thinks of.*

He does, Will laughs, *but he is stressed, we don't know what to learn.*

Why does he have to learn about us? He doesn't want to be a part of our society, he just wants to take our knowledge, Hannibal says, then with a smirk he adds, *it's rude.*

There's pressure, from partners. They want to know, and will always want to know, Will tries to explain, but then he nods in acquiescence, *but he is rude, a bit of the time.*

Yet you still follow him, even though you do not agree with his orders.

I work for him like people work for you.

Hannibal turns to face him fully, something playing across his face that Will can't place. *I am respected, Jack is but a nuisance. Don't you want to be rid of him? Don't you feel like he holds you back?*

I do not mind being held, Will deflects, *this is new situation, he's a rock.*

An anchor, Hannibal murmurs in agreement, *do you need an anchor?*

Sometimes, I need a teacher definitely, Will tries to avoid it but Hannibal holds on tight, insistent on having the last word.

Perhaps, you could have both a teacher and an anchor in one person, he says, before handing the book over, *I found this and thought of you, it should be easy for you to read as it contains many modern conversations.*

You want me to remember the words? Will asks, huffing slightly as he accepts the book, *and repeat them?*

Treat is as a guide, Hannibal explains, *now, I shall let you retire to your room until dinner. There is no feast, but if you wish to meet with me I can arrange a meal in the meeting room.*

Thank you, Will smiles, a soft hint of it on his lips, *see you later, Ak Hannibal.* Hannibal waves him away and Will goes, climbing down the stairs until he reaches his rooms. He collapses onto his bed, something he keeps coming back to now. He looks down at the book in his hand and flicks through it.

There are many conversations, as Hannibal had described, but it's fables. Stories of myths and gods. The invention of the world, the subsequent fallouts, the heroes and villains. There is a strange twist on them all though, more death than he would expect. The language is more modern, which seems out of place in what Will assumes are incredibly old stories.

There's one that catches his eye, the tale of Aknorra coming into power. Being born with immense power, appointed by a higher being. The language gets confusing in parts, referring to the leaders as both gods and god-appointed. It speaks of safety, incredible magical feats, and murder. It's surprisingly intriguing and Will wonders if Hannibal chose this for him to read specifically because of its in-depth description of how he, or people like him, came to power.

It's narcissistic in the vaguest of ways and Will feels like it's Hannibal to a T.

He works his way through the book and keeps working on it until just before dinner when Jack bangs on his room and brings him over to where the rest of the crew are.

"We're going to meet up with Hannibal after dinner, see if we can figure out where to go tomorrow, you guys can ask questions, we'll get all of our plans settled," he commands.

"I met Ak Hannibal earlier," Will buts in, ignoring the grin from Beverly that she smothers under a cough, "he said we could meet up over dinner to discuss further plans."

“Oh, well,” Jack says, thrown slightly but recovering it, “did Hannibal mention where?”

“In one of the meeting rooms, he said he would cook for us.”

“Hey Brian,” Beverly loudly interjects, “what are the courting rituals like here?”

“I’m not sure,” Brian replies, playfully stroking his beard, “although I’m certain Will will find out soon.”

“He just teaches me language,” Will asserts, for what he’s sure will not be the last time.

“This is an expedition, not a date,” Jack reminds both parties, “Will, can you translate for us at the meal?”

He nods, and Jack leaves it at that. They wait around until someone comes up to them and escorts them to a meeting room at the base of the pyramid, where Hannibal waits with food.

Dinner is both muted and lavish. Muted, as the lights were dimmed somewhat and the entire atmosphere seemed more intimate than the party the night prior, but the food and decorations seemed to fit better in a five-star restaurant. Surprisingly though, the pieces didn’t clash and the mood was comfortable for Will to relax in.

The only exhausting part was the constant translating, back and forth between Jack and Hannibal. The words start blurring together and he can barely break to eat. The mouthfuls he does get are bursting with flavour, and he makes sure to thank their host for the meal.

It’s no problem, Hannibal assures him, *I enjoy cooking and sharing my craft with those around me.*

Thank you anyway, Will says, *your art is enjoyable for my mouth.*

“Hey,” Beverly nudges him, “no flirting at the table.” She sends a smirk his way, comfortable in the knowledge that Hannibal can’t understand her. Will flushes, also grateful for that fact and not noticing the twitch of Hannibal’s lips.

“Shut up,” he mutters, placing a piece in his mouth to avoid having to talk anymore. This is problematic because now the two parties cannot talk to each other, and they have to wait for him. Beverly takes it in stride though, sparking a conversation with Jimmy and Brian so that there is at least some noise. When Will is ready to continue he only has to filter questions between the leaders of the groups, passing information back and forth.

“But what’s this?” Jack will say, in reference to a dish.

*That is made from some small birds, it is a delicacy, intended to be eaten whole,” Hannibal will reply.

“But what is the significance of it?” Jack will ask, virtually ignoring Will even though he is vital to their conversation.

It is a defiance of our enemies, Hannibal will answer, making sure to include Will in the conversation, but still growing impatient.

And so it continues, back and forth covering topics that Will doesn't even have words for anymore until Hannibal calls the meal to a close and sends them off to their rooms like misbehaving children. Well, he sends Jack off to his room like a misbehaving child, he sends the rest away with some extra food, as well as suggesting a few places for the next day. Even though they all get the same goodbye, the tone towards Jack is much more dismissive, but not enough to be considered rude.

"Will," Peter asks, as they are both about to enter their rooms, "tomorrow can we see the dogs?"

"I've been wanting to," Will tells him, "I'll ask the guides." Peter nods once, a sharp tilt down, and then turns to go into his room. Will follows suit, laying on his bed and reopening the book.

His dreams aren't in English.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Thank you everyone who has read/kudos/bookmarked etc, it is all amazing, and you give me life! Let me know if there are any errors, I don't have beta and I am very tired. I hope you enjoyed, and have a great day!

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Something is wrong, this is his design.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he leaves his room in the morning, Will is confused. His dreams were cryptic, something following him through the village, even though he couldn't see it. He could hear the hooves behind him, feel it's breath, but whenever he turned he was alone. He had tried to outrun it, chase it, but it never showed itself. The town remained empty, not even Will's steps disturbing the ground.

He's slightly unsettled as he prepares to leave his room. Even though he knows that there isn't anything on the other side of the door, he worries about what he'll find. He still opens the door cautiously, but there's no one there. He's still nervous about venturing out by himself, worried that he'll turn a corner and see the beast, or go somewhere he's not supposed to and hear it breathing behind him. He goes out to the corridor and contemplates the pros and cons of knocking on Beverly's door.

The decision is taken from him though when down the corridor she appears, a smile on her face as soon as she sees Will.

"Hey," she says, "you're awake early this time!"

"It's been two days, how do you know last night wasn't the exception?" Will fires back, rubbing an eye as an excuse not to look at her.

"You got that look about you," she tells him, looking him over like a detective, "I bet you only get up early if you have to."

"I've got dogs, I always have to," Will snarks, and Beverly laughs.

"Well, it's time for breakfast," she redirects when she gets her breath back, "Brian and Jimmy wanted to walk with me but I forgot my shoes." Will looks at her feet, and sure enough, there are only socks there, peeking out from under her pants. "This corridor still feels like inside a hotel, ya know?" She mentions, pushing her door open to reach in and slip on some runners.

"It is comfortable," Will allows. It does feel oddly touristy, like a hotel from a particularly themed theme park, or even just a rundown village built into a mountain. Almost like they were expecting people. He assumes that these are just uninhabited houses, maybe for people

who live by themselves but don't mind sharing meals with others. He hates to think that they had been cleared out for the group, he hopes they were just empty beforehand.

The two walk down the corridor until they meet up with Jimmy and Brian, both of them chatting idly at the door. They fall into step beside them as they travel around the town for food. The people are nice, offering meals even though there isn't anything that they can give them in return. Will has been giving them some of his coins anyway, if only so that they can create something new with them in exchange for their hospitality.

As they eat their breakfast finger food, they have a walk around, admiring the buildings and people while trying not to be creeps. There's an obvious social hierarchy, not just between leaders and people, but also within people themselves. Like at the feast, one group seems decidedly separate, more mature and looked upon even as they joke around with friends. Will isn't entirely sure how anyone gets to be one of these people, whether it's through experience or trials, but it's an interesting facet of their society nonetheless.

They wander around, feeling more like tourists rather than scientists. Around every corner is something new, something like what they know but not quite. The people aren't waring of them, which is nice, there's no fear anywhere. Some merely don't care, but some will call them over to their shops or market stalls, showing them their wares. For some, Will gently steers the group away, knowing that the products aren't quite right, but for others he lets them get blatantly scammed. It's almost pleasant watching the scientists fall over themselves to buy something that's a glorified bowl. It's interesting, but they've already acquired three others. The different colours do not give different effects, and Will can tell the shopkeepers are enjoying it as much as he is.

Along the road they also see animals, dogs and cats mostly, wandering around and letting people pet them. There are the occasional birds, either pets or wildlife, that peck along the floor for dropped food. Will takes pity on a small one, gently handing off the corner of whatever bread snack Beverly had gotten for him. He tries to give it the corner with the most seeds, and the bird seems to appreciate it, blue feathers puffing up as it eats. The rest of the bread gets gently handed out to a few more curious birds, and even Beverly comes along to feed a few.

The food isn't as different as some of the more extravagant meals Hannibal had offered, the bread he recognises and a few street stalls remind him of places he's seen. Some of the flavours aren't what he expects, and some he recognises. There's a fish stall he makes a note of, the sliver he gets as a sample dancing across his tongue in a way that reminds him of home.

It's nearing midday when they come across Ak Hannibal, standing with a group of hunters, talking with them. His body is tense, a deep-thinking frown crossing his features. The words between the two are sharp and quick, information being passed much too quietly for Will to hear.

Hannibal notices Will watching them and switches his attention to the group, waving them over.

Ak Hannibal, Will greets, mirrored by the others around him, *what is happening?*

I believe this information should be shared to all of you, Hannibal murmurs, *I have already sent a messenger for Jack, they should be here soon.*

Is there problem, with us? Will asks cautiously, *have we disturbed you?*

No, this is not because of your group, Hannibal assures, *follow me, we need privacy.* He turns, quickly making his way to a more secluded spot in the pyramid, leading them all to the same room they shared a meal in the previous night.

“What’s going on?” Beverly asks, nudging Will, “what did we do?”

“Ak Hannibal said it’s got nothing to do with us,” Will says, “maybe there’s an unsafe area of the village?”

Jack comes through the doors next, lead by a messenger who swiftly departs once he’s been deposited. “What’s happening?” He asks, directing the question mostly to the air.

“We don’t know,” Jimmy tells him, settling himself down in a chair.

Will, Hannibal says, gaining his attention, *this morning we discovered something that concerns your group.*

What is it? Will asks, sitting down in his seat from last night.

We already have put out messages and are taking precautions, Hannibal assures, skirting around the topic entirely, *your safety is still important.*

What happened? Will asks again, nervous now.

Hannibal takes a second, then quietly he tells him, *this morning we found your companion, Peter, dead. Someone has killed him.*

Will stops, his brain halts, then frantically kicks back into gear. He looks down, hunches slightly, and hugs himself around his middle. That’s not good. This is- how? He saw Peter last night, they were going to see the dogs. He was fine, no stalkers or anything like that, no fear about the future. Did he know? Should Will have known?

“Will?” Beverly asks, “what’d he say?”

Oh, he’s going to have to tell them. They don’t know. He forces himself straight, swallows the lump that’s threatening to suffocate him, and prepares himself.

“They uh, found a body,” Will manages, “someone found Peter this morning. Murdered.”

“Oh,” Beverly breathes, slumping down into a chair. She puts her head in her hands and just absorbs the information. Hannibal watches as the team seem to fall apart as one, just letting emotions sit with them. There are tears, there are dry eyes, there is simply a sense of mourning hanging around them.

I can take you to see him, Hannibal offers, Will translating it on instinct.

“Yeah,” Jack mutters, “we should.” He stands, ready to leave already. Will follows suit, and the group pick themselves up.

It’s near the farms, but I must warn you of the severity of the murder, Hannibal says lowly, not wanting to break the team after they’ve just gathered themselves.

“It’s not pretty,” Will warns as they make their way to the site.

“It’s never pretty,” Jimmy huffs, trudging along. They make their way to the scene, a few farmers and hunters milling around. They’ve hung up blankets to cover a horse stall, and the people look on them with pity as they approach.

We haven’t touched the body, their guide from yesterday tells Hannibal, *we have left it for them.*

Thank you, Abigail, Hannibal returns, before turning to the group, *we have left it for your own burial,* he explains.

Thank you, Will murmurs, scrubbing a hand over his face and turning to the group. “They’ve left him for us to bury,” he explains.

“We shouldn’t touch it until they’ve done forensics,” Brian hums, “get the asshole who did it.”

“You got a forensic background too?” Beverly snaps, “let them do their thing. If they don’t mind us burying him, I say we do it.”

“I actually have,” Brian returns, “so does Jimmy, moved over from forensics a few years ago.”

“We haven’t even seen the body yet,” Jimmy argues, “let’s leave all of this until we’ve seen it.”

With that cue, Jack carefully peels back the blankets, letting them all step through to see the damage.

It’s Peter, tucked into the slashed stomach of a horse. There’s so much blood covering everything that no one can really tell how injured Peter was either pre or post mortem. The blood flows down, covering the hay in rivers. Will’s boot is mere millimetres away from a stream of it, still slowly spreading.

“They got any leads?” Jack asks, trying to keep the sorrow out of his voice.

Do you have knowledge, Will asks Hannibal, who’s standing carefully off to the side, *of who-* he cuts himself off, not quite sure what to put next.

We have no witnesses, Hannibal tells him, *there is no indication of what happened that we can see without moving the body.*

“They’ve got nothing,” Will mutters, crossing his arms defensively as Jack’s eyes narrow.

“Do they mind if we help get the sonovabitch that did this?” Jack asks, mostly rhetorically as gears are already turning in his head.

“I’m so rusty,” Jimmy mourns, “and there’s no equipment here.”

“We can try, surely,” Beverly defends, “anything is better than nothing.”

Can we help find information? Will asks Hannibal, *some of us have teachings in this.*

Only if you are comfortable, Hannibal assures, *loss weighs heavily on everyone. Don’t do anything you may regret.*

“They’ll be no regrets if we get this guy,” Jack assures once Will’s translated. With that stamp of approval, the three who are actually trained move forward to examine any part they can without disturbing too much. There is very little evidence, even less of which can be identified without a lab. Jack is not discouraged by this, instead turning to Will.

“No,” Will snaps immediately, “I’m not-”

“We have nothing else,” Jack argues, “unless you don’t want to help.”

“Of course I do, but not like that.”

Jack glares at him, backing him into a metaphorical corner. Will looks away first, and Jack gives a sharp nod.

“Clear out,” he orders. Beverly, Jimmy and Brian look at him strangely before turning to exit. Hannibal makes no move, and Jack looks ready to yell at him but then realises that Hannibal is not actually under his control.

“Let him stay,” Will murmurs, running a hand down his face in preparation. He takes a step forward and closes his eyes, letting the pendulum swing back and forth behind his eyelids. Suddenly he’s standing there, stalking his prey to the stalls. He watches as his own hands strike out, anger fuelling his every action. The death isn’t drawn out, but it’s not quick either. It’s as it needs to be, simply an element of his art.

The horse is easy to kill and slash open, easy to tip onto its side. He takes a considerable amount of time to rearrange everything to perfection, stuffing and presenting.

It’s a revenge, it’s an audition, it’s a hatred of the system as well as a desperate try to become part of the system. This is his design.

Will opens his eyes, turns to the side and pukes onto the hay.

———

After the embarrassing display, Will is lead to a meeting between Jack and Hannibal to discuss further steps. They go over and share any evidence either may have, and Will lets himself simply be the translator for a time. They discuss the legal system here, (*we will deal with them appropriately,* Hannibal assures), what protections their team will have (“I don’t

want this to be the beginning of a trend," Jack stresses), and what more will be done with the investigation, which Will doesn't quite have all the words for.

Then Jack turns to him, "what was your assessment, Will?" He asks.

Will mutters; "whoever did it was angered by their lack of recognition for their, uh, art? They wanted to be initiated by someone and they wanted to mature from it. It was carefully planned, but the victim didn't really matter." He carefully repeats this to Hannibal as best he can.

"Is this a serial killer?" Jack asks, "are my team in danger?"

No, Hannibal returns as Will translates, *I assure you this is in an isolated event, we have not had any murders in the past months even, and your team is safe.*

Jack nods, thinking things through. Will watches the gears turn in his head, planning, preparing, thinking. "We'll leave you to your investigation then," he remarks, "I'll meet with you later." He leaves, Hannibal offering a goodbye to him in return towards his turned back. Will watches him go and vaguely decides to leave as well.

Stay, Hannibal offers, getting up to grab a jug and pour two glasses of something, *you've had a tiring day.*

Yeah, Will agrees, grabbing the cup when it's passed to him and mumbling thanks.

How are you feeling? Hannibal asks, watching as Will takes a sip of the drink.

Not great, Will admits, humming at the taste, *what is this?*

It's a drink used for relaxation and peace, Hannibal tells him, stirring his own, *I thought you might enjoy it.*

Are you attempting to drug me? Will asks, a smile playing across his face.

No, it won't have that kind of an effect. It's merely relaxing flowers and herbs together, like lavender.

Will hums, taking another sip, and noting the different flavours he can taste. There's definitely lavender, and nothing tastes sharp or odd enough to actually be a drug. Not that he expects Hannibal to drug him in any way, but this entire day has left him feeling tense.

He's relaxed and steady when Hannibal decides to restarts the conversation, *may I ask about what happened today?*

Will hums, *most of us had teachings in finding people who hurt others, so we wanted to help the findings.* He takes a sip to swallow the lump in his throat that's been chasing him all day, wanting to close his eyes and look away but he knows what he'll see behind his eyelids.

Did you all learn together? Hannibal asks, *is that why you're a team?*

Oh, no. We did not know until the, um, death, Will murmurs, losing steam.

Hannibal reaches over wordlessly to fill his cup again. *I apologise for your loss,* Hannibal tells him, *it was a tragedy, but we are thankful for your help in our investigation.*

We wanted to, Will deflects as Hannibal fills his own cup.

Though, I am curious, why did Jack have to clear everyone out for you to work? Hannibal asks, a gentle probing to test the waters.

Oh, Will mumbles, *I have a…malfunction? My brain isn't right, I do not do what they did.*

What were you doing then? Hannibal continues.

I feel what others feel, and think what they think, my brain is a mirror-like, Will tries to explain, trying to find the words to describe what he does.

Heightened empathy? Hannibal guesses, *on everyone?*

Yeah, Will huffs a breath, *it's why I avoid looking at eyes and faces.*

The eyes are the window to the soul, Hannibal nods sagely, *do you often use your empathy?*

Not using it, Will argues, *it doesn't go away, it's always being used. I just use it differently. It's why I study language, I learn from others, words are easy if you know the feelings.*

Yet you call it a malfunction, Hannibal muses, *it sounds like a gift.*

No. It's not. It's not just feelings and thinkings, Will defends, *it's more, like words, and touching. Not just in my brain, I have many malfunctions together that make me feel as others feel.*

Your empathy is still a part of you though, Hannibal tells him, *it's a blessing, to be able to imitate others so easily.*

I get stuck, Will murmurs, *I am scared someone will come in and won't leave.*

I assure you, Hannibal murmurs back, the space between them becoming intimate, *I will help you remove any unwanted guests from your mind.* In any other context, that would seem like the creepiest thing Will has ever heard in his life, but under the dim lights, drinking soothing tea and with Hannibal so carefully creating a safe space for Will it just seems nice. It seems so genuine and Will wants to let himself fall into the soft reassurances.

Their cups are finished as the sun sets, a soft darkness filling this space aside from a few candles placed around the room. Will has slouched over the table, Hannibal preferring to lean ever so slightly against the back of his fancy chair. Will almost snorts at the sight, Hannibal still so composed and regal even as Will feels himself loosen.

He can see Hannibal soften too, just a subtle relaxation of his muscles, a calm more prominent than the usual. Will is looking at the space between the shoulder and the neck, watching the muscles there unclench, projecting clear calm. Will can sense though, that as they sit together in silence there lay words unsaid between them. They aren't pressing conversations, they aren't even conversations that Will wants to touch, but they're there, hanging between them on threads so thin that at any moment they could snap. To try and keep them up longer Will carefully engages in idle conversation. Hannibal smiles, predator-like, as he engages in the topic of their history.

Darkness curls further into the space, the candles running low as Hannibal weaves his words, pouring his story like honey through Will's mind. He seems to take notice of the dimming light, and he winds his story to a halt.

(A small part of Will's mind whispers to him, wanting to remain here with Hannibal until the lights dim completely, until they are both left in the crushing dark. Exposed, as they are hidden. He shakes it off, but only just.)

I believe it is time for us to retire to our rooms, Hannibal offers, sweeping to a stand and gently taking Will's cup from his hands.

Yeah, Will mutters, *I am exhausted.*

As to be expected, you've had a draining day, Hannibal allows, placing both cups gently on a tray. Will struggles to his feet, waking himself up from his trance enough to walk back to his rooms.

Thank you for letting me stay here a time, Will says as he makes his way to the door.

It's my pleasure, Hannibal replies, *if you need anything, do not hesitate to ask me.*

Will nods vaguely and makes his way out. The town is dark, lit only by a few lights. People don't shy away from monsters in the shadowed edges, not even the children are scared. There's a killer on the loose and no one seems fearful.

Will's room feels too empty when he falls asleep, even though he worries about someone hiding in the corners.

Chapter End Notes

As always, let me know if there are any glaring issues. Thank you for all the hits/kudos/etc, it's the highlight of my day! Thank you for reading, and I hope you have a great day!

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

A midnight stroll and several new friends.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wakes in the corridor, fear in his eyes. There's a memory of hoofbeats, feathers, a beast chasing after him yet never getting close enough to harm. He feels off-balance, confused, and shaky. Sweets pours down his face in rivers, bunching in the crevices. It feels like blood in his mind, sticky and hot, as he rushes to wipe it off.

It's still dark out, too early in the morning for anyone to be wandering around. There are no candles lit, the dark presses inwards, curling around him. He feels almost stuck within it, seeing the shadows dance out of the corner of his eyes. He shakes himself out, and retreats back to his room, closing the door and sinking against it.

He breathes, just inhales and exhales until he's certain he's alone. It's not too worrying that he's sleepwalking, it happens when he's stressed. He was doing it less, but it was really just a matter of time until the new environment provoked him enough. He just hopes it won't turn to hours of walking without his awareness.

At home, his dogs would be there, covering him in fur and licks and trying to make him feel better. Now he's just cold. Lonely. He wants to be back in his house, his boat rocking on the ocean. He can't be though, the helicopter won't return for a few more days and the likelihood of Jack packing them all up to leave is close to zero. He's too stubborn, too bull-headed. This death will only push him further, wanting to find out more. Any setback will be used later, cashed in like a cheque a few days late. And who knows how Mason will react (not well, Will guesses, he probably will only care about the death as an abstract, rather than as a person gone.)

Will can't stay here, in his cold lonely room. He needs to get out. He doesn't care if he's running into a trap, he can't stay cooped up here waiting for the sun to rise. He grabs his pack and rifles through for a torch, grabbing one and clicking it on just to see if it works. It illuminates the room, and Will lets the light sweep around the room once. He changes too, shucking off the clothes stuck to him with sweat and replacing them with new ones that'll undoubtedly get soaked as well in time.

Then he reopens his door, taking a second just to let the light bounce through the corridor. It makes him feel cowardly, scared of the dark when he can now see there was nothing there.

He makes his way out carefully, the corridor seems longer now, the dark making it both larger around him and suffocatingly small.

He hurries along, leaving the corridor and going out into the night. The moon shines down, illuminating the path in front of him as he continues through the dark village. There's no-one out, which is both reassuring and disconcerting. He hurries along laneways quickly, his feet taking him to the farms without conscious thought.

He finds himself facing the horse stalls and knows instinctually that's he facing the bloody stall he was in just yesterday. He forces himself away, knowing that he doesn't need to look any creepier than he currently does.

He follows the path, continuing on his aimless walk instead. As he passes a dark alley he hears steps behind him. He lets them follow, nervously waiting for the first strike when he feels the soft nose of a dog butt against his hand. There, following him as he walks, is a mutt. He's got beautiful fur, a deep blonde that borders on brown, and though he seems alone he's not uncared for.

Will huffs a laugh, smiling as he crouches down to pet the dog that's decided to follow him. The laugh turns watery, but he stubbornly holds back any tears, instead turning his attention to the dog.

"Hey bud," he murmurs, ruffling his ears, "how do you feel about being called Winston?" There's an answering huff from the strange dog, and Will smiles. The dog pulls gently out of Will's cupped hands and trots a few paces away, looking back as if to beckon him further.

For a second, Will is concerned that Winston is luring him into a trap as Peter was, but the thought flits away quickly. Someone who could have so easily slashed a horse would not show enough kindness to a dog to train it to lure others. He follows.

Winston leads him back through the winding path, and eventually down another narrow alley. As they walked a few curious dogs had followed, but now they come upon a little dog house. It seems to have been built years ago, left almost to ruin. The dogs still use it happily, and Will can see clear care was put in for it.

He takes a second to pet and play with the dogs who come out of it, grabbing a worn-down brush to take care of a few tangles. He wishes he had his bucket and hose, something to truly clean them, care for them. He has to make do though, and with each dog carefully cared for, he can continue to stay out for just a minute or two longer.

When he's done them all, and the sun still hasn't fully crossed the horizon, he turns his attention to the shelter. He carefully pulls away the bits too destroyed to be salvaged but is happy to find most is still useable. He rebuilds it, tries to substitute bits and pieces with other things he finds until the little dog house doesn't have any more holes in it.

As he works, the dogs begin to wander away. With the light of day shining down through the houses, the dogs begin their daily routine or going for food or friends out in the town. Winston stays by his side as he patches up the last hole in the roof, affectively stopping any water from falling through.

With the dog house put back together again, and the dogs cleaned as much as he can, Will is forced to re-enter society. It's well into the morning now, and Will is glad he changed out of his sweat-soaked pyjamas, at least he won't be embarrassed as he walks back to his room. Though, exiting through an alleyway that no one saw him enter will probably be just as odd.

He takes a breath and leaves anyway, ready to be looked at oddly. It won't be any different from usual. The sun seems brighter when he's out on the actual pathways, and he takes a second to adjust. Winston sticks by his side as Will carefully adjusts back to the bustle of the town, making his way around the stalls to find some late breakfast. He settles on the bread dish he had yesterday, too drained to try something he might not like.

He eats it as he makes his way around, happy to slip into the crowd as much as he can. He meanders his way through the stalls, not really noting anything in particular, but rather the experience as a whole.

It's going well, being just one of the crowd until the guide from yesterday suddenly runs towards him.

Will! she calls, *are you okay?*

Uh, yes, Will answers honestly, *you are Abigail, correct?* That's what Hannibal had called her.

Yes, Abigail says, casting her eyes quickly over Will's body, *Ak Hannibal and your friends were worried about you when they couldn't find you. You weren't attacked?*

Will feels a blush crawl up his neck, *no, I just wanted to go on a walk around.* Why didn't he think of that? Of course, it would be worrying not to find him in his rooms, especially the day after a murder.

Abigail only nodded and smiled at him though, understanding written plainly on her face, *you should get back, they've thrown themselves into chaos without you.* She stops, her eyes skirting down and locking on Winston, who's patiently waiting. *You have collected a stray.*

I did in the past at home, Will admits, *do you not keep them?*

Oh, no, Abigail says laughing, *many are strays, but of course people keep their own dogs. Either are cared for equally.*

Oh, Will murmurs, but he would still feel better looking after them personally. Maybe's he's just used to people being too harsh to strays, no one's around for them.

Come on, Abigail says, *we should let your friends know you are alive.* She starts on her way, and Will follows. They hurry quickly through until they reach the pyramid again. He's beginning to suspect Hannibal lives there, considering how central it is to the town and how often they come back to it. His team is hovering just outside, with Hannibal and Jack trying to communicate with each other. He can see their tension from where he stands.

Beverly notices him first, having not been dragged into a tense conversation, and dashes over to him.

“Asshole!” She yells, “where the hell did you go?”

“I just took a walk?” Will tries as she whacks his arm.

“Well we woke up at 7, it’s 9 now. You were on a walk for two hours?” Beverly questions incredulously.

“I woke up earlier than that,” Will admits, “I just got preoccupied with the dogs.”

Bev’s face falls for a second, probably thinking of Peter, but Jack and the rest of his crew arrive before she can say anything. Winston trots away as the others approach, knocking past Will’s legs as he leaves.

“Where were you?” Jack orders, though fear is there in his eyes. They would be screwed if Will was the next target, how would they survive without proper communication?

“I got distracted by the dogs,” Will admits softly, noting how Abigail and Hannibal take a second to talk to each other. He suddenly feels guilty for worrying Hannibal as well.

I am sorry I caused you to worry, Ak Hannibal, Will says, and the two turn towards him.

We were only worried for your safety, Hannibal returns, forgiveness in his words, *now you have returned, and my worry is dispelled.*

“You should have seen Jack and Hannibal,” Brian pipes up, “the number of hand signals going around. Jack started yelling as if it would speed up the conversation.” Jimmy nods, and Bev lets out a little snort. Jack is not as amused, shooting the group a collective glare before turning back to Will.

“You can’t go running off, we need you to translate,” he pauses for a second, “there’s also a murderer running around, and we don’t need another one of us killed.” Will nods along, letting Jack presume his compliance. Jack huffs, “everyone back to our rooms, we shouldn’t be travelling around unless we’re in groups.”

“Sure,” Bev agrees easily turning to Jimmy and Brian, “you two up for another round of UNO?” They go off together. Jack looks back at Will for a second, but he waves him off.

“I need to talk to Ak Hannibal about something,” Will lies, “go ahead. I’ll be fine here.” Jack nods and goes to follow the group, and Will is left with Abigail and Hannibal. Abigail takes a quick glance between the two men and dashes off with a quick bow.

Come inside, Hannibal offers, *I had lunch prepared for your group but they seem to have left.*

Only if there is enough for me, Will agrees, following Hannibal as he sweeps up the stairs. He leads Will back to the room from yesterday up high on the pyramid structure, though in the brighter light of day it doesn’t seem as intimate as it was.

Lunch seems to be a mixture of light finger food, some almost similar to things Will knows but some so alien. Hannibal gentling guides him through the more complex options, saving Will from any future embarrassment. As Will swallows his last bite, Hannibal decides to strike up a conversation.

I admit I am curious, Hannibal begins, *about where you went this morning?*

I was going to ask in the future, Will admits, a smile pulling at his lips, *I found some dogs, got distracted.*

You care for the dogs? Hannibal asks lightly.

Yes, I had some in the past at home, Will says, *I named one I found Winston.*

Winston? Hannibal tries the word, rolling it around skilfully though it's so separated from the rest of the language, *and your ones at home?*

I left them at home, Will says sadly, *with a neighbour.*

Well I hope you can find more for your family here, Hannibal says, taking a sip as Will thinks that over. Having given him time to adjust Hannibal speaks again, *though, what were you doing out before your friends?*

Will swallows, *I woke up because of a nightmare,* he says, *I was walking in my sleep. I freaked out.*

Sleepwalking? Hannibal asks lightly, visibly leaning forward a bit, *do you do it often?*

Not often. Only when I'm stressed, Will takes a sip of his own drink, this time to prevent himself from saying any more.

And you've had a very stressful time, Hannibal allows, *you've been forced to translate, transported to a new place, and suffered a great loss. They would take a toll on the mind.*

I was awake so early, Will admits, screwing his eyes shut, *I keep thinking something is following me as I walk in my dreams. And sometimes when awake.*

You must be tired, Hannibal says, *if it will ease your mind, you can sleep here tonight? I will ensure you do not wander too far from the room.*

I already take up your time, space and energy, Will denies, *I couldn't also take up your room.*

You wouldn't be imposing, Hannibal shoots down gently, *please, to appease my own worries as well.*

For a night, perhaps, Will relents. Hannibal smiles as if he's been a prize, but only for a flash of a second. The conversation moves swiftly through to other topics, skirting around death but somehow clinging to the ideals of the society. Hannibal leaves Will with a book as

he goes to deal with a few papers. Will happily reads away, happy in the balance they've created between being alone and being together.

The book sucks him in, and he reads it for hours. Hannibal returns but they work together in easy silence, nothing needing to be said or done between them. It's only when a yawn rips free from him and his eyelids droop that they re-engage with each other.

Come, Hannibal offers, *I'll put you up in a guest room to sleep.*

We haven't even had dinner yet, Will protests.

Don't worry about dinner. You were awoken too early, go to sleep now, catch up on your rest, Hannibal says, standing up out of his seat as if to lead Will away.

Let me sleep in my room then, Will offers, *I do not have to use your rooms.*

You are my guest, Hannibal deflects, *and Jack will not be pleased if you go wandering around again.*

A blush crawled up Will's neck. *I'm not a child,* he grumbles as he too stands.

No, Hannibal says softly, *you are Mosurre.* He watches Will blink at his seemingly private thought, but refuses to explain and instead beckons him down the hallway. Will follows almost nervously as they go through the winding hallways and eventually make their way to a bedroom.

It's not massive and lavish, but it's larger than his own room. It seems better than what he had expected to be provided for a guest, though with Hannibal's hospitality he's not sure why he expected anything less. Hannibal moves around the space easily, setting blankets down on the bed and ushering Will into it. He goes but sits up instead of laying down.

Hannibal turns back to the wardrobe in the corner of the room and carefully takes out a shimmering gold robe to place gently around Will's shoulders. He recognises it from the scraps Jimmy and Brian have shown him and his breath stutters as the weight settles around him.

Is not this precious? Will asks trying not to move lest it falls to the ground. He doesn't want to seem ungrateful, but he also doesn't want to destroy it accidentally.

It's my ceremonial robe, yes, Hannibal agrees, *though I thought to offer it to you for the night to ease your mind.*

I do not want to break it, Will protests, still sitting awkwardly still.

You won't, it's not so easily broken, Hannibal assures, running a hand over the material and tugging as if to demonstrate it's strength.

Will follows suit, gently running his hands over the smooth material. Though it seems to be made of gold and silver, it's incredibly soft. There are chains of gold hanging down, with elements of silk. Small gems reflect the light, though not blindingly so, and they seem to be

stuck on though none are falling off. As he moves his hand around the material he notices a dark mark right near the bottom, where it may have brushed against the ground if Hannibal was wearing it. (Though, with the differences in height the robe may fit very differently on Hannibal than how it now fits on Will.) Hannibal doesn't seem alarmed when he too flicks his eyes over the dark smudge, so Will assumes it has always been there.

We believe that a part of us will stay in the robes, Hannibal explains as Will runs his hands once more over the material, *it will watch over you even if I am in the next room.*

Why does the part stay in the robe? Will asks, rubbing two fingers across a seam even as he lifts his eyes.

The robe is symbolic of our transformation, our maturing, becoming the greatest version of ourselves. It becomes a significant part of our transformation, so much so that we bond with it, Hannibal explains.

So I am holding your soul? Will asks, a grin forming.

You are always holding my soul, Hannibal admits softly, and a blush blooms across Will's cheeks. He must be translating wrong, there's no way. *Sleep now,* Hannibal murmurs, ignoring the tension that's sprung up in the room, *if you need me I'll be down the hall.*

He watches Hannibal as he leaves, and tucks himself into the bed. He shucks off some layers but keeps the robe hanging around his shoulders. He doesn't slip his arms through the holes, but rather keeps it around his shoulders. He tucks himself in under the covers, noting how soft the bed feels. It's not as hard as the ones in their own rooms, but instead, it seems to envelop him gently as he lays down. He'd hate to sweat all over these, he can't imagine how hard they'd be to clean. The sun has barely begun to set but the light in the room is already dim. Nestling his head gently against the pillow Will closes his eyes and drifts off.

In his dreams, there are flashes of golds and silvers. The robe is before him, a cocoon, and he watches as Hannibal emerges in glory from it. Blood sticks to him as he leaves, tiny threads snapping as he walks across the empty abyss.

They turn to face each other, and they're both covered in blood. It feels hot, sticky, but also freeing. It runs down to the floor in fountains but it's always surrounding them, like he too has walked out of the robe cocoon, both of them powerful. But he hasn't, his blood runs off to the floor, he's still weak even as Hannibal stands triumphant. Hannibal's robe surrounds him as well, and his transformation is beginning. He wakes before he emerges, the robe still around his shoulders, both a comforting weight and a strangling hold.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, I'm going away for the weekend so I'll hopefully have time to write a bunch more. Uni is starting in a week, but honestly I'll probably write as a form

of procrastination. Also, thank you for all the hits/kudos/etc, comments and kudos give Will a hug, he needs one. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed and have a great day!

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

A breakfast, a burial, and a safe place to stay.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will awakens, he finds his bag. Someone must have brought it for him while he slept. A part of him worries that someone has been here without his knowledge, but he also knows that it was probably Hannibal who came in here. Such a good host would have worried about anyone else disturbing their guest.

(He too wonders if Hannibal had stayed, had watched Will being held by the robe. He doesn't know if he wants Hannibal to have done so or not.)

He changes quickly, gently placing the robe back where Hannibal had taken it from the day prior. His clothes aren't sweated through, and he didn't even sleepwalk. Perhaps the new environment did do him some good. (Perhaps, knowing that someone was watching over him did him some good.) He doesn't want to intrude, but maybe he could sleep here more often.

He carefully pads out of the room and follows the sounds of society through the magnificent hallways until he finds himself in a fairly large kitchen. There's a pantry and a fridge, or at least a cooler box, and a few utensils. The counter's take up the most amount of space, with various spices and ingredients littered around. There are a few places to cook the food, both an open fire for roasting and a more covered one for grilling. The entire place is made of stone, though in some places it looks almost like marble. From what he can see it seems like it belongs to Hannibal himself, though the size suggests it's communal.

And there in the centre of it is Hannibal, chopping up something with his back to Will. He turns as Will comes in though, seeming to have heard his footsteps.

Good morning, Hannibal greets, *did you sleep well?*

Good morning, Will parrots, *I did, thank you. Thank you for the robe.*

I see you have divested yourself of it, Hannibal nods at Will's clothes.

Yes, I did hang it up, Will replies easily, coming further into the kitchen carefully, *what are you making?*

Some eggs, and pork, Hannibal says, *with a savoury salad and dressing.* At least, that's how Will interprets it. The names of the dishes are much more complex, they don't really

sound like the language he knows, but that's the basics of what they mean. He imagines it's like calling scrambled eggs and sausages a 'protein scramble with braised pork', that kind of fancy that only lives in the corner of Will's mind.

You do not have to give me a fancy breakfast, Will says, coming over to where Hannibal is gently cutting up the meat.

If you help me prepare it, Hannibal starts, only to be cut off.

Then it will not be so fancy, Will huffs.

But it will be fancy enough for us, Hannibal rebuts, passing Will a knife and a tray of leaves. Will takes the knife and tries to cut the leaves as orderly as possible while Hannibal prepares the other ingredients. They slip into a quiet conversation about the food, and then abruptly start to talk about Will's skill with the language.

Contractions do exist, Hannibal reminds him as he puts some of the meat into a pan, *you forget to put them together occasionally.*

Your structure is so strange, Will half marvels, half complains, *there is such a difference from what we speak at home."

There's, Hannibal reminds with a soft smile.

There's, Will repeats, feeling a smile tug on his own lips.

You are improving incredibly quickly, Hannibal assures, *you only mix up a few things, and many mistakes you make are not repeated, they are simply accidents. I've heard about and known many here who struggle as you do.*

Yes, the children, Will nods, playing along, *they would struggle as I do.*

Then, would you say, that Jack is no smarter than a child? Hannibal asks, startling a snort out of Will, *because you are certainly more intelligent than him.*

Flattery will get you nowhere, Will huffs, turning the cutting board around on the counter, *now, what else do you want me to slash.*

Hannibal gently takes a few of the tomato-like berries from a bowl and sets them down. Will takes one and goes to cut it when Hannibal stops him with a gentle hand.

These need slightly more skill, he says, coming around to stand behind him, *gently, like this.* He guides Will's hand down as he grips the knife, and together they slice up two or three. Hannibal is a warm weight against Will's back as they work, and he can feel Hannibal look over his shoulder. There's a steady huff of breath against his neck, but he doesn't mind.

When Hannibal lets go to let him continue on his own, there's a second of hesitation between them, like neither want to separate, but eventually, they do. Hannibal grabs the things out of the fire, and Will gently deposits the berries he cuts into a bowl. Hannibal takes all the

ingredients and does something magical with them, plating the two serves on his arms as he shepherds Will towards the table.

It's not the same one that they've been using for more official meetings, not even the one they had lunch on. It's a slightly smaller, more intimate one, something almost resembling a chess table, with the two of them sitting opposite each other.

Breakfast is delicious, Will would say even more so than some of the other meals they've had. Though, just knowing they've made it together makes every aspect of it better than others. He appreciates the way Hannibal eats his mangled tomato-berries, even though the ones Will cut on his own aren't nearly as perfect as the one's he cut with Hannibal's hands on his.

I'm glad you had a pleasant sleep, Hannibal says as he finishes his plate.

Yes, thank you, Will says, *and I noticed you had someone bring my bag, thank you for that.*

I had someone bring it here after dark, but I was the one who put it in your room, Hannibal admits, *There was important business I had to attend to, otherwise I would have got it myself.*

Important business? Will asks lightly, setting the cutlery on his plate.

Yes, Hannibal says, *we found the man who murdered your friend.*

Oh, Will murmurs, glad they've had breakfast before this revelation, *who?*

A man named Clark Ingram, a Tume, Hannibal morphs the word around his mouth as if it's offending him.

A toom-ay? Will questions, cocking his head slightly.

A Tume, someone who hasn't completed our rituals, he picks up Will's plate as well as his own and transports the conversation back to the kitchen. *You are a Tume, most of our town is.*

And Clark thought killing Peter would let him transform? Will asks, watching as Hannibal carefully cleans the cutlery, *become a,* he pauses, *the not-Tume.*

An Ulime, Hannibal says, never one to miss a learning opportunity, *yes, he made a mockery of our the ritual. He will be punished, rest assured, and, when your group prefers to, you can continue with your burial practices.*

Yeah, Will hums, wishing for a drink, *do you have a plot of land we could use?*

I can coordinate with the farmhands if you like, Hannibal says, *you should tell your friends as well, have a service together.*

I should, Will says, finally taking a step back from the counter, *I'll see you, later?*

Tonight, Hannibal agrees, watching Will as he carefully steps out the door and begins his descent back down to the village. Bright daylight spills across the pathways, and Will neatly weaves through the crowds until he comes across their rooms. He pads through the corridor and knocks on the door he knows Bev is behind.

She smiles when she sees him on the other side, and a flash of regret fills him as he looks inside at Jimmy and Brian. Bev tugs on Will's shirt collar, inspecting his neck.

"What are you looking at?" Will asks.

"I'm looking for hickeys," Bev snarks, "what?" She asks when she sees Wills face, "you slept over at Mr Hannibal's place, don't tell me you just slept. I know you slept together."

"We didn't," Will insists, pushing her away lightly, "he set up in a guest room, gave me the robe thing as a blanket, and then left to sleep in his own room."

"His ceremonial robe?" Beverly asks, incredulously, "he just gave you his Ceremonial Robe, as a blanket."

"Yes?" Will returns, "I can ask if you can see it. He told me part of him was in it, and so it was like him staying with me." He pauses, tips his head and feels his ears heat, "okay, that sounds weird, but only in English."

"Oh yeah," Bev says nodding to herself, "yeah, you guys are well past sleeping together, he's lending you bits of his soul."

"Shut up," Will huffs, "he told me something more important anyway."

"More important than your little soul sharing?" Jimmy jokes.

"They found who killed Peter," Will says, "someone called Clark Ingram." Bev visibly swallows, and the fun gets abruptly sucked out of the room. Will averts his eyes further, staring somewhere on the wall, "they're lending us a plot of land to bury him. Just got to get us all together for a burial."

"Better get Jack then," Brian says, "c'mon, he'll want to plan out a place." They head slightly down the hall and alert Jack of the change in plans. He takes it as well as the rest of them did.

"I want to see the bastard," he mutters, "Clark whoever, I want to see him."

"We need to plan a burial site," Bev reminds gently, "lay Peter to rest."

"You guys go work on digging up the site," Jack says, waving at the three, "Will, you come with me to wherever they're holding this guy and I want to talk with him."

"We'll go to the site first," Will argues, "I'll help set up where the plot is going to be and how we'll get Peter in there, and then I'll come with you. We can do the funeral after."

Jack reluctantly agrees and so together they make their way to the farms, where a few workers are already milling around. One waves the group over to a small plot of land just

under a large tree.

Ak Hannibal said you needed a plot that wouldn't be disturbed, the man says, *no one plants under the tree, and the cattle won't trample the earth. You can bury your friend here if you want to.*

Thank you, Will says, translating back and forth, *can someone help us dig a hole, for him?*

Yes, we understand your loss, we have a few who are willing to help you. Sure enough, there are a handful of men and women standing with tools, ready to get to work. Will carefully helps to direct them to whatever needs to be done, though he can see Jack getting antsy beside him. It's past midday and he worries that they'll run out of time, even though they could go later.

Will offers his thanks again, and once he's sure nothing will fall apart without him there to help communication he leaves with Jack. One of the farmers is kind enough to point them in the direction of the jails, which aren't like traditional cells. There's only one prisoner, who Will assumes is Clark, and the cells are barely fitted. There isn't a bathroom, not real tables or chairs. It doesn't seem like they expect people to stay very long, and Will isn't sure if that is concerning or if it simply means their rehabilitation efforts are advanced. Though, it could also simply be an in-between cell with the actual prisons somewhere else.

Clark watches as they come to the bars, and Will notes a plate of food next to him.

Why have you come? Clark asks, watching the two almost warily as Will translates.

"I wanted to ask you some questions," Jack says, crossing his arms.

Yes? Clark drawls, almost bored.

"Why the hell, did you target Peter?" Jack yells, "why the hell did you need to kill him?"

Clark laughs as Will translates, a low chuckle bursting free. *He was an outsider, and weak. I should be an Umile, they've kept that from me for years! I needed to show them, show them that I was ready.* His eyes turn hard, gaze bouncing to them standing near the door, *and they care more for your little group than they do for one of their own.*

"What's an oom-eh-leh?" Jack hisses to Will.

"It's someone who's done their maturing ritual," Will tries, "it's a transformation, Hannibal said."

"He did this over a ritual?" Jack asks incredulously as his rage deepens and he turns back to Clark, "at least they caught him now."

"Yeah," Will agrees, watching the man actively ignore them. He turns back towards the plate of food as they leave, though now Will can see it's piled high with white berries, and only white berries.

Hey, Will calls out, *why're you eating those? Aren't they for the pigs?*

Clark looks at him and puts another few in his mouth, *don't you see?* he says, *I am a pig now.*

When Jack turns to ask him what happened, Will brushes him off, with a quick 'it's nothing'. They leave, thanking the guards for letting them speak with the prisoner, and the guards assure them it is no problem, they are guests after all.

They trudge back together and come back up to the farms. Along the way, Winston weaves through the crowd and follows them. He trots alongside Will and doesn't mind when his fur gets a little dishevelled under Will's hand. He stays with them all the way back to the site. There's already a hole in the ground, dug up by shovels Will can see lying around. There's also a body wrapped in cloth that Will can only assume is Peter. Without a coffin, they have to simply lower the body into the ground by hand. They leave him wrapped up though, soft cloth surrounding him.

It doesn't rain, though clouds roll gently over the sun. They gather a few flowers together to place over the body, and then just stay there, looking down.

"Should we say something?" Brian asks, looking into the hole.

"Maybe," Will allows, but he doesn't offer anything else. If anything, he'd probably make the mood worse.

"Peter," Bev starts, "you were pretty great." She sounds choked up, and there are tears in her eyes.

"Yeah," Brian agrees, "damn, I'm sorry it was you."

Will watches as the group deteriorates individually all over again as if they've just heard the news for the first time with tears shining in eyes or falling down cheeks. He can't bring himself to cry though, everything just seems to be passing through him. He clutches Winston's fur, a gentle soothing over his snout and neck, just enough to keep his hands busy so he doesn't start wringing them.

After a minute he goes and picks up a shovel that's been placed near them, and gets to shovelling the pile of dirt. Clumps fall into the hole one at a time, the thunk sounding eerie. He doesn't get too far on his own before Jack decides to help, and together they slave away until the hole is full. Will pats the dirt on top of the hill, smoothing it down even though he knows that there's no way to make it look like it was undisturbed. Someone tosses a handful of flowers over the top, and they search for something that could resemble a headstone.

They come up with two large sticks, that Bev ties together with some rope one of the farmers is nice enough to lend them. They stick it into the ground as a marker, leaving the cross leaning heavily to one side. After a second of deliberation, they leave back down the way they came, though Winston dutifully stays behind to watch over the grave. The tree is fairly visible from the front of the farm, and it's nice. He imagines these people will probably watch

over it better than his own, he knows his own gravestone will probably be vandalised before the dirt above him has settled.

He wants to go to his room and collapse, have dinner in bed and then just let sleep take away the rest of the day. He makes it halfway to his room before he realises that he's left his things in Hannibal's guest suite, and he'll have to brave that before returning to his own.

He waits on the path outside for a second, debating if he should knock or not, before deciding to at least climb up the stairs himself. He reaches where Hannibal's rooms are and sees Hannibal coming towards him, having just put down a book.

Will, he greets, *come in.*

Ak Hannibal, Will returns.

I was told you buried your friend just now, Hannibal murmurs, leading Will further into the room. He comes closer, broadcasting his actions, and gently pulls Will into a hug.

Will goes easily, stiff for a second but melting into the embrace. He curls his arms up on Hannibal's back, and then feel tears leak out of his eyes. He just clutches Hannibal close, leaning into him as he finally lets the emotions and grief run through him. His feelings race out of him, butting into each other on their way out and tearing through his throat. He's not bawling or sobbing, but every now and again a wheeze or whine will force it's way out with the tears.

He comes back to himself to find Hannibal's fingers gently curling around his head and through his hair. *Mosurre,* he whispers softly against his hair, in between gentle shushes.*Sorry,* Will mumbles against Hannibal's shoulder, *this is probably very gross.*

It's no problem, Hannibal assures, *you've been through very challenging times, you've buried your friend, it's perfectly natural for you to grieve.*

Contractions, Will mutters, an echo of a lighter conversation before delving back into sudden darkness, *I probably messed up your fancy furs.*

My furs can be replaced, Hannibal says, *your feelings cannot.*

I feel shattered already, Will murmurs, *at least the rest will be calmer.*

Do you believe you can come back together again? Hannibal asks quietly.

Maybe? Will huffs, *not by myself, at least.*

Hmm, Hannibal hums as Will gently extracts himself from the hold, *stay again, for the night.*

I couldn't impose, it's a token argument Will makes, and they both know it.

For my own peace of mind, Hannibal offers, and Will easily relents. They have a light dinner together, Hannibal serving some form of fish and greens that is enough for them both.

He leaves everything dark, no bright exposing lights, but not dark enough to cloak the corners in shadows.

With dinner, Hannibal provides the same relaxing drink from a few nights prior. Lavender notes dance across his senses, and the drink goes down smoothly. Hannibal shares a glass with him, and they just sit together before bed. Will scrubs at his face, trying to get rid of the tear tracks he knows are present. He's relieved to see that Hannibal's clothes don't seem to be too muddied by his emotions.

After they've drained their cups, Will feels sufficiently drained of energy. (Hannibal never seems tired, he still masks himself, and Will isn't sure if he should be grateful for the lack of attack on his empathy, or concerned that Hannibal doesn't open up to him as Will is continually finding himself doing.)

Hannibal gently leads Will back to the guest room as he did the night before, and Will notes that while the bed has been made, it hasn't been packed away.

You expected me to sleep over here again? Will asks, taking a seat on the bed.

Perhaps not expected, Hannibal says, pulling out the robe from the wardrobe once more, *but preferred.* He drapes the cloth back over Will's shoulders, who clutches at it like a shock blanket. Hannibal smooths a gentle hand down Will's back, before leaving him alone in the room.

Sleep well, Hannibal says as he departs.

Thank you, Will offers back, *you as well.*

Will clutches the robe around him as he lays back down, and even though he's not scared of sleepwalking too far it's still comforting to have someone he knows close by.

His sleep is mostly dreamless, and when he wakes he's not sure if he truly slept well or if he's simply forgotten any horror his mind has conjured up.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, have some more words. I hope you enjoyed me torturing Will, (he's my favourite can you tell?) Thank you all once again for all the interactions with my fic, I love you all! Every kudos/comment gives Will a good dream. I hope you enjoyed, and have a nice day!

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Hannibal, Abigail and what exactly the rituals are.

Chapter Notes

TW for talking about Peter's death, depictions of murder (which is a ritualistic sacrifice), and lots of blood etc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Will pads carefully into the kitchen, Hannibal has already made breakfast for them both. Something sad bundles against his heart but he stubbornly puts it aside, pushing through it in the same motion he pushes into the room.

I apologise, for both the early breakfast and for the lack of ‘fanciness’, as you say, Hannibal says as he puts forth a plate of danish looking treats. The little pastries are topped with berries and sauces, colourful blobs of fruit on them, and Will can even see leaves sitting delicately on top of it all.

That’s fine, Will brushes off, taking a nibble of a danish and pleasantly finding it much more savoury than he had expected, *don’t worry about it.* They feel slightly sticky, although the sauce comes easily off his fingers when he licks it. Some of the sauce drips off onto the plate he has, but he scoops it back up with the bread.

I admit to having mourned the loss of our barely established ritual, Hannibal says, neatly pulling apart his own to eat, *I missed cooking with you.*

Oh, Will mutters, feeling heat spark across his hands and back. He hopes there’s no blush on his face, he doesn’t want to seem too desperate considering Hannibal barely looks affected.

I have been making preparations for Abigail, Hannibal admits to fill the silence, *she will be going through her ritual this afternoon. Unfortunately, it is all very time-sensitive and all the elements must be planned quite quickly.*

Abruptly, the warmth leaves his body, instead, a nervousness floods him at having overstepped. *You didn’t have to have breakfast with me,* Will hurries, *if you’re busy.*

I'm not busy enough to miss this, Hannibal says easily, no hint of a lie, *besides, good food should always be savoured.*

I think good is an understatement, Will snarks gently, pulling apart the last of his pastries to eat. Sauce lingers on his lips and he hastens to wipe it off.

Hannibal's lip twitches up, and he nods his head as if in agreement. He takes a sip of his drink, washing down the last of his pastries, and waits until Will does the same before taking both of their plates. Will follows Hannibal's easy movements through to the kitchen.

If you wish to see the rituals, Hannibal says as he puts the plates in the sink, *feel free to. Most congregate at the bottom of our pyramid to watch, it will be easy to find.*

Thank you, Will replies, *my friends will want to watch it, they've been pestering me about your robe.* He doesn't want to admit why.

I'll be wearing it, Hannibal smiles, perhaps picking up on the things unsaid, but leaving it safely in the back of their minds.

Then I'll leave you to your preparation, Will says, taking a few steps towards the door. Hannibal nods in a warm dismissal, and Will leaves, making his way down the pyramid steps and back onto the street. He's well versed in this area now, travelling the same roads everyday means he has almost memorised the layouts. There's still a wonder about the place though, the culture surprising in new ways each day.

He weaves skilfully through, meaning to head back to the group and tell them about the ritual later in the day when he sees Abigail standing near a stall. He debates talking to her but fate takes the option out of his hands and Abigail turns around to see him.

Oh, hi! She says, waving and coming closer, *how are you?*

Hello, Will returns as she walks up, *I'm doing okay.*

You buried your friend yesterday, Abigail says softly, *I heard you used the space under the tree?* There's a soft pity in her eyes, not enough to be insulting and easily overshadowed by care and a hot flash of someone darker.

We did, Will admits, *it was nice, lot's of animals. He would've liked it.*

I'm glad we could offer a place for him, she returns, letting the conversation trail into the dirt. Sensing the almost awkward air, Will rushes to change the conversation away from the funeral.

Hannibal told me you were doing the ritual this afternoon, Will says. Surprise flits across her face for a second, and Will is worried he's ruined a surprise of some sort.

I am, Abigail says, easing his nerves and seeming to come into some of her own, *I'm very excited. I've been preparing for ages, and I was picked over the rest of my class.* She rubs her arm self consciously, her colourful beads clinking together as she moves, *It was unexpected, to be honest. My father was a criminal too, I always thought I would have to try

harder than my peers to make up for it. I thought for sure I would have at least another two years before I was chosen.*

I guess it goes to demonstrate that we're not our parents, Will encourages, *and congratulations anyway. I'm looking forward to seeing it.* He truly is, not only for the reasons he's sure his team will be, but to see them all truly comfortable in their environments.

Oh, thank you, Abigail murmurs, *I'm excited to see you there.* She hesitates but settles on nodding once more before rushing off again, probably needing space before her very public celebration. Will's sympathetic, she's nervous, and the last thing she needed was some stranger pestering her about it, even if said stranger was a somewhat familiar face.

He continues on, and when he makes his way to the rooms he can hear an argument has broken out. It rings around the corridor, bouncing off the walls almost eerily.

"We can't leave," Brian is arguing, "so you're suggesting we just stay in our rooms until Mason picks us up?" There's the rest of the team behind him, silent back up as he wages war against Jack.

"We've lost one of our own," Jack shouts back, aggressive as ever, "this team is not getting put in any more danger." He's planted himself rigidly in his position, and Will knows this will hardly end well, if at all.

"How is asking people about their society dangerous?" Brian shoots back, "yes, Peter died, and we should respect that, but we also cannot stop."

"I say we can!"

"What about Mason, huh?" Bev interjects, "what do you want to tell him. You know he won't care about, ya know, he would ask why we didn't continue anyway."

"I'm already working on what to tell him," Jack says, though a nervous string runs through him.

"I wouldn't put it past him to just leave us here," Bev sighs, "to get it all done anyway." She turns slightly in one of her large hand motions and notices Will standing awkwardly in the doorway.

"Hi," Will says awkwardly, "What's going on?"

"Jack wants to bench us, because of Peter," Bev explains, somewhat petty, "we think we should keep going for him. There's hardly any danger now that they've caught Clark."

"Who knows what else is waiting for us?" Jack demands, sending the room into silence.

"Well," Will mutters, "I just wanted to let you know, Hannibal invited us to this ritual they're doing." The mood lifts slightly, all considering the proposal.

"The one with the robes?" Bev asks interest piqued.

“Yeah, Abigail is becoming an Ulime,” Will pauses at the confusion he can see on their faces, “more mature and powerful. It’s the big transformation ritual.”

The three turn their pleading faces towards Jack, obviously begging to go. He thinks it over for a second, running scenarios through his head, thinking through the possible flaws in the plan, as well as where this would leave him. For a second Will fears pride will prevent him from letting them leave, but he agrees with a tight nod.

“We stick together though,” Jack says before they can celebrate, “we go there together, we leave together, and if anything happens we come straight back.”

“Of course,” the three agree, though they’ve already gone to their bags to grab out anything that looks nicer than the more adventurous and outdoorsy clothes they’ve been wearing the past few days. Will’s bag is still in the pyramid, though luckily he changed when he awoke so at least he’s not wearing what he slept in.

“Did you hear anything else about this ceremony?” Bev asks as she ties her shoelaces back up, “from Hannibal, or Abigail.”

“No,” Will considers, “although Hannibal mentioned this is where the robe becomes important, where a part of the participant bonds with the robe.”

Bev nods rapidly, thinking it over, and straightens up. The group is ready, and together they travel out of the rooms. They wander for a while, getting lunch somewhere in a newer area, and sitting near the farms to eat. In between bites, Will feeds the chickens on the other side of the fence. Around noon, the sound of a large crowd and the underlying boom of drums drive the group to the foot of the pyramid. Already people are sharing food and gifts, and a constant thrum of chatter has started up.

Will watches the people around him, the colourful clothes, the extra jewellery, and a few have some form of face paint. Some are wearing their ceremonial robes, though Will notes that none of them look as lavish as Hannibal’s had. The people in robes are up near the front, bowls and cups in their hands, and Will wonders what they’re drinking. He can see other people's simpler bowls, looking more like cutlery where the others look fancier.

With a few more dramatic notes on the drums, the murmurs die down and Hannibal comes to stand on the pyramid, on the flat level just below his own rooms. His robe shines in the sunlight, casting him in an almost ethereal glow, and his face is adorned in a few sharp red lines, highlighting where the sun bounces off of him.

Welcome, Hannibal calls down, *today we watch one of our own transform into their greater, truer self. It is my great pleasure to bring Abigail forward for her maturing from Tume to Ulime, a great hunter coming into her own.*

The crowd applauds as Abigail comes up next to Hannibal, looking almost shy. She’s wearing her belt, and Will can see there are more beads than he saw previously. Some look older than the others he had seen, worn down in places and paint scratched. They cover her waist completely, and so some have spread up to her arms and through her hair. Across her face are a few lines of face paint, something that is of her own design.

Hannibal continues, *today, Abigail becomes her own,* an assistant hurries up with a robe, which Hannibal takes with a quick thank you and gives to Abigail, *wear this with pride, your cocoon, your protection.* The robe glitters in the sunlight, and Abigail puts it on gently, poking her arms through the holes with a soft sort of appreciation and pride.

Then, rising from the other side come two more assistants, holding between them Clark in chains. They dump him to the ground, holding him to his knees by his shoulders. Clark doesn't struggle, he lets himself hang mostly limp in their grasp.

To take another, Hannibal continues, *is a sign of your true power, a life-changing experience. Abigail will claim her place by killing the pig you see before you.* Hannibal takes a knife, and hands it to Abigail, hilt first. He clasps his hands over hers, gently directing her to the man in front of them.

As a roar goes up through the crowd, Will feels his own hands warm, memories of cooking together coming to the surface of his mind unbidden. He watches, half-frozen, as Abigail grabs Clark by the hair. The knife is raised, a shining light reflects off of it as she brings it down harshly across the vulnerable skin over his throat. His screams are drowned out easily by the crowd's cheer that rises up, people raising their own hands in an imitation of hers as Clark struggles to breathe and slumps over onto the ground.

Blood pours out of the wound, pooling on the platform and trickling down the designs etched into the pyramid. It highlights the patterns, colouring them in as it flows to the ground. There's a sense of completion, that the temple was built around these ideals and not the other way around. People rush forward, placing bowls in divots to collect the blood. As the bowls get filled they move away, another coming to take their place, and then they drink.

Blood flows freely into people's mouths, some trickling down chins and being wiped away. Parents give bowls for children to try, and any that drips to the ground is eagerly lapped up by dogs. Some of the people with face paint dip fingers in and spread it along the lines, letting the liquid stick to their face.

Someone comes up to Will and gently nudges him, making Will flinch back, eyes torn from the body to the man beside him.

Have some, they offer, holding a bowl up. Will watches the blood slosh, a drip flowing over the side causing Will's mouth to dry up. He hastily shakes his head, not trusting himself to speak, and the man shrugs, tipping the bowl back and letting the red fluid flow into his mouth.

At the top Abigail tears into the body, knife flowing through flesh, parting it easily to get to the organs underneath. She parts skin, skilfully slicing a few more things inside before pulling something out and holding it high. The crowd roars again as Abigail displays the heart, a smile filling her face.

"Shit," Bev breathes next to Will as Abigail lifts the heart to her mouth and takes a chunk out of it. She drops the bitten heart into a bowl Hannibal holds out, and together they bend down with their own bowls to scoop up a drink. They drink together, blood flowing freely. They too dip fingers in to paint their own faces, letting blood drip down and transform them.

Will's eyes are drawn to the bottom of Hannibal's robe, where the puddle of blood has grown enough to nudge against his feet. It knocks against the dark stain that Will had admired that night and stains the mark darker. He remembers the feel of that mark against his fingers, the way he had almost lovingly stroked it through the night, a mark of imperfection, of Hannibal's mask, cracking just for him. He should have known what was hiding behind.

Abigail and Hannibal lower their bowls, and Abigail raises her hands, a cheer rising through her throat, triumph and pride written into it. Hannibal lets her roar, and when she's done he leads the crowd in thunderous applause. Hannibal's gaze filters through the crowd, settling on Will.

Will stares back, almost transfixed by the scene, the way the suns shines right behind them to light them up. They look mythical, separated from the rest of humanity, like the blood that flows down to them is something that they'll never experience. He meets Hannibal's eyes and sees the primal power in them. It only highlights the otherworldly way he stands there, and it seems all that intensity is focused on him and he can't look away.

He hears a scuffle behind him, and then a hand grips around his wrist, tugging him away. He can barely put up a token resistance as he's pulled through the crowd, stumbling and eyes locked above. It's only when his view is cut off by the crowd that Will turns to see Jack pulling him back to the rooms.

"C'mon," Bev whispers to him, "you back with us now?"

"Yes," Will replies, still feeling something curl up within him that he's too scared to name.

"It's okay," she soothes, rushing off to follow Brian and Jimmy nearer to the front of their group. Will finally gathers his feet and stumbles to follow them properly, but Jack still keeps a steel grip on his arm.

They stumble into the corridor and only slow their pace enough to catch their breath, still feeling the thump of drums and celebration through the walls. They still hear the cheers, being so close to the crowds outside, and can even make out the sounds of Hannibal calling above the crowds.

Driven further, the group slams into Jack's own room, leaning against the wall or falling to the floor in a heap. Will lets himself curl up in a corner, resting his head on his knees as he breathes. There's soft snuffling next to him, and Will reaches out the tips of his fingertips and feels them brush against soft fur. He lifts his head enough to see Winston pressing against him, looking up at him with big brown eyes.

Will uncurls enough to smooth his hands over the dog's fur, not letting his mind think about what might be on the bottom of his paws.

"We all okay?" Jack asks, slipping into authority to hide his own worries.

A chorus of agreement sounds, almost drowned out by an answering roar on the other side of the wall.

“You okay, Will?” Bev asks, thunking her head back on the wall and rolling her head over to look at him.

“I’m fine,” Will answers, twisting his fingers through the fur, letting Winston settle down almost in his lap.

“You’re shaking,” Bev comments gently, and Will can suddenly feel the tremors running through him. He forces himself to still, forces himself to be fine, and settles further back into the corner.

“Guess you were right about Aztecs,” Jimmy throws out into the room, letting a wobbling smile appear on his face for a second.

“Too right maybe,” Brian mumbles, ridding a hand over his face, “What are we meant to do now?”

“We wait here until Mason returns, then we leave,” Jack says, folding his arms and letting the adrenaline finally begin to flow out of him. Everyone takes a breath seemingly as one, feeling silence settle into the room even if it doesn’t settle outside. They wait out the celebrations, digging out their rations and protein bars for dinner. Will gently breaks off whatever pieces he think would be okay to give Winston, feeling bad that he’s cooped up here with them instead of out with his friends.

No one wants to bring up the inevitable, they’ll have to leave eventually. Whether for food, water, or just because Mason won’t know the first thing about how to get there. No one knows how he’ll react to this, but Will thinks privately that there’s no way he’ll react well. If he were a betting man, he’d say Mason would delight in this kind of carnage, encourage it even. Probably do enough to get himself killed.

The sun sets, the room being cast into deeper shadows, and the group decide to split up to sleep.

“We don’t want to make them think we’re scared,” Brian argues as he gathers his stuff, “I don’t want to know what will happen then.”

Will quietly leaves the room, grateful to find that the hallway is empty. He crosses the short distance to his own room, Winston trailing him. He closes the door behind them both and looks around at his room. A soft layer of dust has settled down, not enough to truly bother him, but enough to show he hasn’t slept there for a while. There’s also a blank space where his bag would be, and Will is suddenly reminded of the fact that he has nothing with him here, nothing for him here.

He ignores it and instead pulls off his shoes and any uncomfortable outer layers. He shoves a set of shelves in front of the door, (both to stop himself from getting out and others from getting in) and shuffles himself into bed, pulling the blanket around his body and trying to settle down for sleep. Winston hops up with him, shoving his body to the side in order to fit. Will curls up and tries to ignore the lump of emotions in his chest, and just go to sleep.

He doesn’t succeed, and spends half the night with his eyes closed and forcibly shoving thoughts out of his head as they arise.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! Thank you to those who commented, I love y'all and I will try to reply to every comment I get. Also, over 1000 hits!!! Thank you to everyone who's given this baby a shot, and made it this far! Always feel free to ask me anything in the comments or yell at me for making Will sad. (Also, have you noticed my joke? Ak Hannibal...A cannibal...I'll see myself out.) I posted a bit earlier this chapter just to see if it suits more people or whatever, just letting you know. Anyway, see you next chapter. Thank you for reading, and have a great day!

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a talk, and Will has an experience.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will awakes with bloody hands. He stumbles backwards frantically at the sight of it, almost tripping over Winston who's standing anxiously beside him. The dog whines as Will shoves his hands under his armpits, hiding them from sight and blinking away demons from behind his eyelids. Once his vision is clear and his heart has stopped attempting to beat its way out his mouth, he starts trying to figure out what has happened.

The room is trashed, blankets and pillows thrown to the floor, a few light stands knocked to the ground in no particular order. Will is standing in front of the door and is shocked to find deep scratches on the surface of it, gouges like a man crazed trying to escape, or an animal against the bars of a cage. The dresser seems to have held against his frantic movements, though it's been pushed around slightly, knocking into the door and causing a few more dents.

Winston doesn't seem to be hurt, instead, he's trying to gently shepherd him to sit on the bed, pushing and nudging at Will's knees as if that will convince him to move away. He was probably scared, worried about Will's bizarre actions. He feels bad for trapping Winston in here with him, refusing him freedom to instead sate his own fear.

"I'm okay," Will mutters, refusing to sit and instead taking a look at his hands. His skin has been rubbed raw in some parts, but the more bloody parts appear to be at his nails, where he's scratched desperately at the door. They hang bleeding and chipped but he doesn't appear to have lost any at first glance.

He wipes them on his bare legs, hoping to get some of the blood off, and sets about cleaning up the room. He shoves things back where they're meant to go and does not think about the reason he would be scratching at the door in the first place. He tips the stands back up, carefully puts his clothes back in them, and then tucks the blankets back onto the bed. It looks less like a tornado has raged through, and more like an animal. It doesn't make Will feel much better.

The last thing he does is push the cabinet back away from the door and where it's meant to go. With it gone, he can clearly see the streaks on the door where he'd scratched at it, coloured in by his own blood in an eerie mirror of the pyramid the day prior, like he's tried to

replicate it in his sleep. He hastily tries to scrub it off with his sleeve, getting most of it out and smoothing down any obvious gouges. Flecks of his blood stay there to mock him though.

Finally, feeling slightly ridiculous, he scrounges up enough courage to pull the door open. He lets it swing open, reaching the end of its arc before hitting the wall. It bounces back, but Will holds it open, looking down the expanse of the corridor. It's empty, as expected, and Winston happily trots away down it. Most likely gone to find his breakfast. Will should probably do the same.

Will sighs and resigns himself to entering the world in the clothes he slept in. He takes a step out the door and immediately spies something on the floor. He almost stumbles over it but is able to catch himself, stopping to a halt right before his feet would nudge it.

It's his duffle-bag, sitting there innocently on the floor. Hannibal must have delivered it during the night, leaving his rooms after the ritual just for Will. He hates to think of Hannibal standing outside his room. Hates to think of him pushing on the door, finding it closed to him when Will has only felt welcome in his presence. He quickly drags it inside, closing the door again.

Resting on the top is a note, written carefully in looping letters that remind Will of cursive, if not for the language it's written in. The paper feels heavy in his hand, like expensive silk sheets that he knows he shouldn't touch. He feels like he knows who wrote it before he even truly reads the words.

'Will,' it says,

'I missed you last night in my rooms, I hope whatever has driven you from them hasn't left you more shattered. I have made you breakfast, though I regret not being able to make it with you. It may have more than the usual "fanciness", but I trust you will still find it enjoyable.

'I am aware that you may feel overwhelmed after our ritual yesterday, I hope whatever has so distressed you and your friends can be resolved. If you need to discuss it with me, my doors are always open for you. I hope to see you again soon, come back to me.

'From, Hannibal'

It doesn't look official, no signature or stamp to label it as a notice. It feels intimate, just Hannibal's words on paper, for his eyes only.

Will gently sets the letter aside and opens his bag, finding the breakfast sitting at the very top. It's in a bowl, a few leaves wrapped around it to prevent any oil or juices from spilling into his bag. Unwrapping it reveals an omelette, a side of leaves and diced meat sitting elegantly (if not a little squashed) just off to the side. It looks delicious, but now Will knows, now he sees. As Abigail on the pyramid, his mind has been reborn, things have clicked into place that hadn't before.

It's human meat. He's sure of it, little bits of human flesh sitting delicately in the bowl like they're not stressing Will out by simply existing. It's probably Clark's liver, presented and

gifted to be eaten, prepared carefully by Hannibal himself. That's what they've been eating this whole time, maybe not for every meal, but enough.

That first feast, they were feeding them people. They sat together and Hannibal looked at him and told him it was pig, knowing it wasn't. How many more was it in? How many times did they sit together and share in it? Every meal, every second meal? Has he watched Hannibal prepare it for him, talked with him casually while human flesh was heating in a pan?

Does he care?

Will scrubs a hand over his face, forcibly covering up the meal and setting it aside. Of course, he cares. This was a breach of his trust, an abuse of the faith he had put into the society here. Not only that but he was eating people without knowing it. It was like murder, but not quite. Murder he didn't even consent to participate in!

He huffs out a breath and double-checks his bag. When nothing seems out of place, he grabs a spare outfit that's at least mostly clean and gets changed. He sorts out his back a bit more, making sure to separate the more dirty items from the cleaner ones. He leaves the breakfast on his bedside table, watching it as he eats a bland ration bar. He doesn't know what he expects, that it will jump out and hurt him somehow? That it will form into a physical manifestation of his uncertainty and taunt him?

He shakes the thoughts away and leaves, closing the door behind him to put some space between himself and the people-breakfast. All the other doors in the hallways are closed, and Will can hear the soft sounds of chatting, probably some of his team finding a way to spend the time.

He thinks, and debates, and contemplates going in but eventually decides not to. Carefully, as if scared to be found out, he walks down the corridor. His boots clunk against the floor, but no one seems to notice, and in almost no time at all, he's outside. The sun glints off fallen confetti-like gold left on the floor. Shavings of jewels and bits of jewellery are also strewn around, sometimes seemingly on accident. There's little evidence of the feast they heard from the night before aside from a few bones still being gnawed on by dogs. Winston has managed to wrangle one away from another stray who's got their fill and is currently gnawing on it. He perks up at the sight of Will and picks it up as he trots over.

Will finds his eyes drawn to the temple, where the blood still highlights the grooves in the stone. The patterns are even more evident in the early morning sun, dark red lines absorbing and reflecting the sun in parts. Glittering like jewels, like the gold still left half-buried on the ground. It's even more haunting in the morning light, like it should be hidden away in the sunlight, too shameful, too mythical to be seen in full light.

He hurries towards it, averting his eyes from the lines as if they'll disappear if he simply stops thinking about them. Every second step he runs his fingers across Wilson's fur, just grounding himself in the moment, convincing himself what he hears is his own heartbeat and not the drums of execution. They still echo behind his ears though, like if he looked he would see the splash of blood, Abigail standing triumphantly over the death.

He makes it to Hannibal's place with little fuss, not meeting anyone's eyes and steadfastly ignoring the eyes he can feel against his back. He ascends the stairs quickly, this time keeping his eyes higher to avoid the blood against his boots. At Hannibal's door, he raises his hand to knock, before stealing his nerves and rapping his knuckles quickly against the door.

When the door opens, it reveals Hannibal's soft smile as he invites Will inside. They settle not in the formal meeting room, but in the softer, more intimate living room, each taking a seat across from the other.

I'm glad to see you back here, Hannibal begins, a hypothetical olive branch stretching between them, *I admit, I was worried when your group fled last night.*

It was not something we're used to, Will starts, *we have a much different justice system. It was unsettling for us. They thought we were in danger, we wanted to regroup and stay safe.*

Hannibal leans forward in his chair, just enough to shift his centre of gravity, *I apologise for any panic we caused you, rest assured, you are not in danger here with me.*

It's, Will swallows, *it's the performance of it. We condemn murder in any form, even if it is art.* He scratches his neck, *usually they see it as deforming the body, a higher crime. Defiling mostly, there's a lot of people who kill others just to ruin them.*

You did not expect it from us, Hannibal guesses, *do you think lesser of us for completing our rituals in such a manner?*

No, Will admits, surprised to find he means it, *it's part of you and your culture, I can't tell you to change it.*

You are simply repelled by the taboo, Hannibal surmises, *not the action being committed itself. There's no reason to doubt yourself, you are experiencing something new.*

Will laughs, a soft scratchy thing that bursts free unbidden, *something new,* he scoffs, *I've seen murder before, Hannibal. I've seen it a great many times, none of them good, even if the person behind it thought they were being justified, or creative.*

You've also seen art, Hannibal hums, not at all insulted, *you know the difference between unnecessary violence and elevation, taking something unusable, useless in some cases, and turning it into something beautiful.*

Yes, Will admits softly after a beat, *I understand the difference.* Yesterday truly was beautiful, captivating, something that drew him in more than his work in forensics ever did. He'd seen works of art before, but this was something entirely different, like comparing a child's drawing to the Mona Lisa. This was what he had always been drawn in by.

But yet, something niggles in the back of his mind, a pressure on anything good he's found here. It constantly beats in his chest and head like a drum, or a heartbeat.

Why did you say it was pig? Will asks finally, his voice coming out softer and sharper than he had intended, *what we ate for the first feast.*

It was, Hannibal hums, *they are. Can they be called human after the crimes they have committed? Our ceremonies are known, and we only use those that are deserving. Those who take others in a mockery, those who are rude.*

You gave them to us, in the food, Will shoots back, *we should have had a choice.*

You've always had a choice here, Will, Hannibal murmurs, *haven't you?*

Will doesn't feel like examining that too closely, so he simply doesn't. He lets the room settle into silence for a heavy beat, both absorbing the conversation, even though it feels like Hannibal has won whatever argument they've been having. Hannibal gently picks the conversation up again first, moving them to a new room in order to help Will mentally recover. It's another small living space, though instead of bookcases there is simply a wall of art, both paintings and sculptures adorning the room. They settle back into chairs and begin to talk. They discuss books, culture, anything and everything but the rituals. Time passes quickly and slowly, a paradox that only exists in Hannibal's presence. When lunch comes Will is there in the kitchen with Hannibal helping him to prepare the meal.

He's given the vegetables, and for that he's grateful. Hannibal doesn't help him as he had before, no reassuring weight against his back, but Will thinks that it's maybe for the best. He doesn't quite trust himself to not do something stupid if Hannibal decides to hold his hand through the knife motions. (He doesn't know if the memory it drags up will be from the ritual of murder or breakfast.) When they eat the extravagant dish, containing some sort of rice mixed with meat and vegetables, Will gently picks everything apart until he's sure of everything he's putting in his mouth. At least as sure as he can be with the odd ingredients put in, though every meal he's had has included them.

The sun sets quietly, and the conversation trickles off naturally. Will's nervous about a room being offered to him, nervous of what response he'll have, but thankfully Hannibal understands and instead offers to see him back to his own room.

I'll be okay, Will huffs, *I've dealt with worse than the dark.*

Let me bring you to the door, at least, Hannibal insists, sweeping to a stand and beckoning for Will to come. *Do you think you're group will continue to learn, or should we prepare for you to hole yourselves up in your rooms?*

I'll ask them, Will says, *I'd like to continue, even if they won't.* He pauses, a thought occurring to him, and he mutters darkly, *we'll probably be forced to continue anyway.*

You're under no pressure from us, you are always free to do whatever you wish, Hannibal assures, *though I will await your return, we can continue your lessons. Perhaps there is something I can learn from you as well.*

Will grins at him, *perhaps,* he repeats with a teasing lilt. Hannibal returns it as he pushes the door open for him, and on the other side is Winston, who perks up when he sees Will.

“Hey, boy,” Will murmurs, bending down to pet over his neck. Winston wiggles happily under his fingers, moving to and fro in order to get scratches everywhere.

It seems you have an admirer, Hannibal says with a smirk, nodding at the dog, *I remember him from a few days ago.*

Yeah, Will says, straightening back up, *I fixed up this little dog house I found, Winston has been following me around since. Though he leaves to find food, I assume. I don’t really have anything for him.* Winston barks once, as if in agreement, and Will gives him a quick pat.

The dog shelter in an alley? Hannibal asks, strangely intense.

Just over there, Will points over to the right, *it was the morning I sleepwalked. I’m sure you remember, it was the dogs that distracted me.*

That house was built by someone very special to me, Hannibal admits softly, *thank you for bringing it back.* Here the ‘it’ sounds more like a ‘them’, but unless Hannibal is putting a soul into the dog house, Will is pretty sure he’s just mistranslating.

It’s okay, Will says a little pathetically in the face of Hannibal’s emotion, *I like dogs.*

And they seem to appreciate your company as well, Hannibal says, *as do I.*

I like talking with you as well, Will smiles back, just a small, shy little thing.

I hope you return tomorrow, as well as your friends. My door is always open to you. Gently he clasps a hand on Will’s shoulder, squeezing once.

As Hannibal releases, Will waves goodbye, hopping down the staircase and retreating back to his own rooms. Winston follows him almost the whole way, trotting away before the entrance to the team’s rooms but after he had gotten another good pat from Will. Will indulges him, mostly because he wants to, but then he returns to his room alone.

He moves silently, closing his door as quietly as possible. He can see the gouges he left this morning, the moonlight highlighting them differently than the sun, deepening them but smoothing them out. He drags his mind away from it and sits heavily on his bed, toeing off his shoes.

He and Hannibal had their fancy lunch together, but they hadn’t had dinner and so Will was feeling the effects of hunger gnawing in his stomach. He could grab a protein bar from his bag, that is a possibility. He had enough to spare one from tonight, had plenty to spare for every night for the next few weeks if he really needed to. They weren’t filling, but they were made to be enough.

To his left, the breakfast bowl sits, mocking him. He lets his eyes flick over to it, almost cautiously, before he reaches over to grab it. He settles it in his lap, just looking over the food inside. It’s not a matter of desperation, it’s a questioning of himself. Is he ready for this step, this irreversible step? Does he even truly know the consequences?

Will’s never been so sure of anything in his life, but he knows that if he eats this, it’s something he can never take back. But is it something he’ll want to take back? He’s already eaten human flesh, already consumed it, however unknowingly.

But Hannibal’s right, he’s always had a choice. From the first night he knew something wasn’t right, he knew that there was something unseen, something that people weren’t telling him. He knew somewhere inside himself that what was happening was noteworthy, even if he refused to accept it at the time.

With the moon shining softly into his room, Will grabs a piece of meat between his fingers and places it gently into his mouth. Flavour bursts on his tongue, though underneath it all Will can taste its importance. The flavour has changed from the one he’s experienced the first few nights, but it hasn’t at all. Will eats it all, hunched over in the dark, with only the moon to watch him. It feels freeing, but also shameful. He knows here there’s nothing to truly be ashamed of, nothing to fear except how the others of his team will think of him.

But he thinks of Hannibal, his sharp smile and his softer one, the care he put into everything, including the meal. He thinks that even if he is not here with him, this meal has brought them together. Like the ritual’s cloak that covered him in the previous nights, Will is consuming the part of Hannibal that’s been put in this meal.

Once done he puts the bowl aside and feels settled enough to sleep within trapping himself in his room. He has the insane thought that if his body wants to go and find something in the night he should let it. He feels safe.

And somewhere deep inside, he knows without a doubt he is.

Chapter End Notes

AHHH!!! You guys!!! Thank you everyone for all your comments, and kudos, and bookmarks, and everything!! You are all super amazing, I love you all, the amazing response to this fic has been an absolute highlight of my day/week. Special mention to KamRaeTay who commented on every chapter as they read them and led to a flurry in my inbox. I will reply to each and every comment, but I'm doing it after posting this chapter so if you're coming fresh as I update (welcome, hi!) it might take a second. I know this chapter is a bit later than usual, but rest assured this fic has been written up to chapter 11, so even if I find myself in a writing slump (eg, this week) there will be something I can post.

I hope you enjoyed, and have an amazing day!

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Some important conversations that need to be had, and some that aren't said but are felt nonetheless.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Blinking his eyes open and finding himself standing up is distressingly normal for Will, but he’s relieved to find himself still inside his room. He scans his body quickly, finding no injuries, nothing out of place. His feet don’t ache, though there is a covering of dirt on his sole.

His room is undisturbed, no tables tipped over, his bedsheets only slightly rumpled, and for that Will is grateful. It seems whatever terror had hit him the night before has left him, at least for the night. He doesn’t want to admit to himself that it was probably Hannibal who had chased it away.

He can’t remember his dreams, only flashes of them. Bright colours, shimmery patterns and Hannibal. He remembers him most clearly, everything else is a blur, colours swirling into each other but Hannibal remains a steady rock in the middle of it all.

He takes a step forward on unsteady feet but gets his balance on his second, and he makes his way slowly to his bag. He rifles through it to grab some new clothes and quickly changes. The empty bowl still sits silently next to his bed, somehow more obscene empty than it had been when it was full. He leaves it there, almost mocking in its simple existence, and leaves his room.

He walks absentmindedly through the corridor, eventually making his way to his fellow teammates room. He hesitates, feeling separated from them somehow like he has been made inhuman after his feast. He almost wants to feel the top of his head, expecting to feel the bumps of something inhuman tearing through his scalp. Unlike yesterday, his decision is taken from him when the door is opened.

Beverly smiles at him, motioning for him to come in. “We missed you yesterday,” she says, leading him to the rest of the gang. There are UNO cards scattered around the floor, like a game was half played before it was discarded for something else. Research papers lie around the table like it was picked up instead of the game and poured over in the chaotic way that only professionals can achieve.

Jack watches as they walk in and nods at them both. “Bev went to wake you yesterday, to bring you back with the rest of the group,” he says, “your door was locked, apparently.”

“I pushed a set of drawers against the door,” Will mutters, the English words feeling weird on his tongue, “to stop me from sleepwalking out of my room again.”

“Again?” Jimmy asks quietly, looking more to Brian than to Will.

“It’s nothing to worry about,” Will insists, “I was just taking precautions.” He can feel Jack’s eyes on him, judging him. They take a second to weigh him but slide off when they find no fault. At least, not enough fault to be called out.

“Anyway,” Jack continues, taking control of the room again, “we just wanted to stay together for a while, ensure everyone is safe and leave as soon as possible. There’s nothing more for us to do here.”

“Hannibal said we can keep doing our investigation,” Will pipes up, his words stretching the empty air almost against his will.

“Well, I’m sure his opinion of us has changed over the last couple of days,” Jack rebuts.

“I spoke to him yesterday,” Will tells them, prompting shocked glances from the rest of the room, “he said he wouldn’t mind if we kept on with our studies. He wants us to."

Jack’s face goes an almost impossible shade of red, becoming bloated with blood. “Why did you go see him?” He thunders.

“He gave me back my bag, dropped it off outside my door, I wanted to thank him,” Will defends, “he’s never wanted to hurt us before, and I thought it was best if I went to see him instead of someone else.” He lets the group take of that what they will, letting them huff over it for a second.

“Will, honestly,” Beverly finally says, rolling her eyes, “this is a bit past just having dinner with him, none of us knew where you were. We could have been left wondering for days where you had gone off to if anything happened to you!”

That shot a round of guilt through Will, who let it hit him for only a second. “I was perfectly fine, I was with Hannibal for practically the whole day, and I had Winston with me.” He turns to Jack, knowing he’ll be tough to sway but the easiest to convince, “Hannibal said we can continue our investigation knowing that we’ll be safe. He offered a few places we could visit and people we can interview.”

“His promises mean nothing after what we’ve seen!” Jack protests, “we were promised safety before, and know we’re down one and sticking together just to ensure it doesn’t happen again.”

“I would take Hannibal over Mason,” Will says softly, trying to pack as much intensity as he can into his words, “we research now, or Mason comes with whatever he deems fit. At best he leaves us here for another week to find out more,” he lets himself drift, reaching for the remnants of Mason in his mind, “at worst he leaves us here forever, not wanting to pay for another trip across. Either way, we’re faced with the tribe.”

“At worst Mason kills us himself,” Brian adds darkly, looking down at the carpet as his foot skids across it, “at least we know Hannibal will only do it if we actually commit a crime.”

“We’re stuck here either way,” Will reiterates, lifting his head enough to bore his eyes just on top of the bridge of Jack’s nose, as close as he can get to the eyes.

Jack huffs angrily, his face heating up a bit. He looks just off to the side, breaking the mock staring contest first. “We’ll talk to him,” Jack agrees, “but together, no one goes off on their own.” He tracks back onto Will, glaring hard.

“We’ll go for lunch then,” Jimmy suggests, “a nice meal together to soothe out the murder.”

“Yeah,” Brian considers, “do you reckon there’ll be another sacrificial murder, perhaps as some kind of morbid appetiser.”

That strikes Will, and suddenly he’s torn between warning his friends of how morbidly close they are to the truth, and wanting to keep this secret close to his heart for just a little while longer.

“We can go just after,” Will suggests, “makes it easier to leave if we need to.”

“Or just before,” Beverly offers, “gives us an easy excuse if we need to leave.”

Jack nods slowly, “we’ll go just after breakfast, everyone grab something to eat and then we’ll head out.”

They don’t rush to comply, instead, there’s a fair bit of groaning as people dramatically get up from their chairs to find bags. Will goes to slink off back to his own room but Bev grabs his sleeve and tugs him back inside. She offers him a spare bar, something that proudly advertises it’s made of protein but doesn’t look like it.

“You can have the one with chocolate chips if you want,” Bev offers, “but the chips taste like nothing and they do not cover up the taste of cardboard.”

Will feels a smile tug at his face, “I’ll stick with the ‘coconut blast’, I think.” He holds the bar up, twisting his hand as if to show it off.

“You don’t want to trade for a caramel?” Brian asks, holding up his own.

“Tastes like chemicals,” Bev warns, “I’d stick with the coconut.”

Will grins, “I’ve been eating nothing but the plain ones for meals, I’m fine with anything,” then, just to dash Brian’s hopes; “but I am sticking with coconut.” He unwraps it and eats it in bites, trying to ignore the images of his own frantic meal last night in the dark. Jimmy tries to get Brian to take half of his own bar, but it seems to only send Brian to the other side of the room. Jack sits quietly and eats his own, with no word on its flavour.

They collect up the wrappers into the designated rubbish bag, and Will makes a mental note to move his own rubbish bag into theirs. The note immediately leaves his mind, pushed out by everything else going on in it.

They go out together, boot thuds being muffled by the soft floor. Moving out onto the street draws a few looks, most people curious about the noise but moving on quickly. A few of the looks linger before politely skidding away, though of course there are those that stare. Will tries to ignore it, tries to let their gazes slide off him, but like the sun above it seems to penetrate deep under his skin.

He leads most of the group up to Hannibal's door, Jack always just a half step ahead even though Will has made the trek more often than him. He goes right up to Hannibal's door and knocks gently on the wooden door. On their end, the sound is swallowed by the teeming city below but Hannibal seems to hear it anyway as he opens the door for them.

Welcome, he greets, *come in.* He holds the door open as the group toddles inside, all settling awkwardly into the open space, waiting for Hannibal to show them where today's meeting will take place. Once the final person in their group, Jimmy, gets in and gives his feet a halfhearted wipe on the first step of stone, Hannibal leads them through to an almost identical copy to the main meeting room a floor or so down, similarly devoid of personal effects.

He motions for them all to sit around the table, with Hannibal taking a seat near the head. He graciously asks for Will to sit to one side of him, even pulling out the chair before he takes a seat himself. Jack sits himself defiantly on the opposite end of the table, and so Will prepares himself for a tennis match between them.

Should we begin? Hannibal asks, directing it towards Will.

Yeah, Will replies, a little thrown off with Hannibal getting the first word instead of Jack, "did you want to talk about our next moves?"

"I want to talk about our group's safety," Jacks shoots back aggressively for Will to translate.

Your team is completely safe with us, Hannibal assures, *we pose no threat to any of you, and you have seen our punishment for those who will go against my authority.*

Jack scoffs, "that's the problem. What happens if we break a law we don't know about."

There are no secret laws, Hannibal says, almost amused, *unless you plan on killing someone, you are under no threat from us.*

Will stifles the smile threatening his face, *should I translate the sarcasm?"

Translate however you see fit, Hannibal returns, *I trust your judgement.*

The blush that springs forth on Will's cheeks is thankfully small enough to go mostly unnoticed but Jack still glares a hole in his skull as he translates word for word.

"What if we accidentally steal, or something?" Jack asks, and Will feels himself blink at the suspicious question.

We only use those who commit the worst crimes in our ceremonies, Hannibal returns, *any lesser simply get given community service or a fine. I believe you would also be given the

benefit of the doubt in the court of public opinion.*

Jack seems mostly appeased, and his attention shifts. “Our group needs to do more research while we stay here, we’ve already seen the way you make your food,” and that statement is truer than Jack knows, “are there any significant areas we should look into.”

“Clothes,” Beverly interrupts, “could we spend a few hours on the clothes at least.”

“Pottery, bowls, carpentry,” Brian lists.

“If we’re doing requests, could we see a cemetery?” Jimmy adds.

Will relays the information to Hannibal who considers. *We have not had any deaths recently, so our burial grounds will be available. There isn't a need to make pottery currently, at least not any more than is usually made. It a similar situation for the clothes, Abigail's coat was the last thing made that was important enough to use up more materials than usual. I'm sure if you ask around, we will be more than happy to show you how we create our art.*

“There’s no factory or workshop anywhere for clothes and crockery?” Jack asks.

“Of course not,” Bev tells him, “most other communities of a similar style had individuals creating clothes as needed, with a very limited selection for sale.”

That is true for most, Hannibal allows when Will hurriedly translates for him, *we have experts of course, but simple mending and sewing can be done at home, especially for families with access to cloth and furs. Our cloaks take more time though, with many of our experts in cloth-making coming together to create a single one. Another will not be in progress until I’ve selected another promising candidate for the ritual.*

“So we missed our window for that,” Bev remarks in the ensuing silence, “would someone let us see their equipment though?”

Do you think a stall-holder would let us see how they make their wares? Will asks, taking a second to rub his neck to try and stop his muscles from protesting the constant movement.

I’m sure they would, if you need I can lead your group to some of the most experienced, Hannibal tells them, *perhaps later today, or tomorrow?*

Tomorrow, Will translates Jack’s thoughts, before adding his own, *I think we need another day to settle before continuing on our efforts.*

Of course, take all the time you need. Hannibal lets them go with a promise to introduce them to experts tomorrow, and the group make their way back to the rooms. Will peels off from them as he spots Abigail making her way through the crowds. She spots him too, and they meet in the middle, in front of a stall selling flatbreads filled with meat.

How are you? Abigail asks, *I haven’t seen you in a while, since the ritual?*

You were great, Will assures, *it’s just, we weren’t expecting it. The group freaked out and they’ve been in hiding the last day or so.*

Seeing Clark again, I understand, Abigail nods solemnly, *I felt the same when I lost my dad.* She fiddles with her belt, separating her beads until she finds a particular one and holds it out for him to see, *this one is Clark's tooth, I filed it down,* she shuffles through a few more and holds out another, *and this one is from my dad's hip.*

Your father? Will wonders aloud, gently taking the bead when she passes it over. He runs his hand over it, watching as the other beads clink against it. Nothing really sets it apart from the others, each unique design is different but none overly so. The colours are striking, following the curves and grooves. He can clearly see a progression though, with the more worn ones also having less intricate designs. *Did you-?*

Oh, no, Abigail huffs a laugh, tugging her beads back to settle around her waist, *my Dad killed my mum, tried to kill me too. He was caught though. Tobias used him for his ritual, he makes string with the intestines. He gifted them to Ak Hannibal.*

So Clark's body, have you used it all? He should probably feel worse discussing the destruction of a human body, but honestly he only feels intrigued.

No, I'm holding on to the skull, I want to refine my beadwork so I'll practice on his teeth first. You saw what happened to the heart, and I handed over most of the other organs for Ak Hannibal to use as he sees fit. The rest of the bones I've handed out as people asked, she excuses herself for a second to swipe two pieces of bread from the cart, handing off some coins. She passes one to Will as she takes a bite of her own.

So anyone can take the bones? Will asks, following her lead and biting gently into his flatbread. It tastes good, but he can't help but compare it mentally to Hannibal's cooking.

Only Ulima can use bones of the sacrificial pigs, Abigail explains, *you can get an exception if the person has wronged you personally, so you are technically entitled to any part of Clark I still have.*

I think I already got some of him, Will admits softly, *Hannibal gave me breakfast the day after your ritual, I think it was his liver.*

Abigail grins, her smile full of bright happiness, *Ak Hannibal makes delicious food, doesn't he? He rarely cooks for us, only large feasts for special occasions. He's only ever cooked personally for me once, after my dad was arrested.* Abigail's smile turns a little softer, *Ak Hannibal doesn't cook food just for anyone you know.*

Will furiously stamps down the warmness threatening to spread across his chest and switches lanes abruptly, *you mentioned practising your beadwork, is this just to be better? Do you sell them?*

Well, no, Abigail admits, looking at him like she knows what he's doing, *I have some bones from my mother. Not a lot, just a few small finger bones. I don't want to carve them until I can do it perfectly.* She takes the last bite of her bread, and holds a hand in front of her mouth as she continues, *do you make anything?*

I make fishing lures, Will shrugs, *I used to fish in this river near my house, I would make lures in my spare time.* He's never put a person in them before, but, *sometimes I put feathers I find in them, instead of the ones you buy. I've put in dog fur before as well.*

Hair? Abigail asks, *usually we stuff cushions with it, but it'd be nice to see it displayed. I can get you some?*

There's no equipment here, Will deflects, *and I don't know how fish will react to human hair.*

Abigail gives him another grin, *ask Ak Hannibal, he knows about everything. He'll be happy to find you something.*

I might, Will considers, knowing deep down that he definitely will. He's missed his little river, missed standing in it. Abigail smiles at him and Will shoves the rest of his lunch into his mouth to avoid saying any more. Abigail has to leave after a while though, returning to her own job. Will watches her go and wonders back home himself.

In his own room, he takes the bowl from his side table and goes outside to wash it gently with some of his water. He dries it off with a spare cloth and returns it back to its rightful place. It looks less mocking now, less judgemental in its existence. He can let himself look at it without being flooded with guilt. This was a gift from a friend, perhaps a friend with shifted morals, but a friend nonetheless.

He eats another protein bar for dinner and lets himself drift off into sleep. He dreams of his river, wading into the quietness of it with the beast breathing behind him. He should be frightened, but he knows whatever lurks in the shadows won't hurt him. The darkness caresses him instead, and when his line gets tugged the water turns to blood beneath his feet.

He wakes before he can see what he pulls out of the river.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the late update, Uni has been kicking me around and I am very tired. Thank you everyone who commented/read/bookmarked/kudos etc, you are all so lovely! I hope you enjoyed and have a great day!

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A look at some clothes, and a look at the dark.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will is the one to knock on his team's door, and when it opens the rest of his group come flooding out and shepherd him outside.

"Can you ask Hannibal if we can see the clothes-makers today?" Bev asks, "maybe we can visit the boring crockery stuff later."

"Cheater," Brian mumbles under his breath, a dark look on his face.

"Am I missing something?" Will asks, glancing between the two.

"We flipped a coin to see which one we wanted to do first," Bev explains, "and I won."

"You cheated," Brian shoots back, "I should have won."

"It's common practice to grab it and flip it and place it on your hand."

"You let it land and see what it is."

"It had at least one rotation before landing, for all we know it would have been my side anyway."

"We should have done it again properly."

Will lets out a huff of breath as the argument continues on, and he leads the group back down the road. The track is almost well worn by now, and Will is surprised he hasn't done it in his sleep yet. As they walk on, the crew ask him to grab something for breakfast, a vegetable dish that looks like a stuffed capsicum. It tastes nice, with a slightly sweeter centre but a nicely cooked outer skin. The stall owner insists on no payment but accepts the few coins Will fishes out of his pocket. She smiles at them, pocketing them with the rest of her trinkets that others have given her. The coins like Abigail's are in her bowl, Will assumes it's a replacement currency, but he can't read the words on it.

They eat the dish with their hands, taking a second together. They're about to set off again when Hannibal approaches them, excusing himself from a stall-holder to stroll over.

Good morning, Hannibal greets, *I'm glad to see you're ready for the day.*

'Morning, we were on our way to meet you, Will replies, *we had some breakfast from that stall over there.* He motions to the stuffed pepper stall and Hannibal follows his gaze, nodding along.

A worthy establishment, he says, *though I admit, I was hoping to provide food for you, and your team.*

Perhaps another time, Will replies, *I think we wanted to see the cloth-makers today, as long as they're okay with that.*

Of course, Hannibal smiles at him, *if you would follow me.* He gives the rest of the group a tighter smile before leading the group to another stall a bit further down the road. Even more sellers seem to reach out and offer things to them, aiming mostly at Will who attempts to politely ignore them. He assumes it's because he's the only one who can actually understand them, aside from Hannibal himself.

The person Hannibal leads them to seems a lot calmer in his approach, and he seems to have expected them. He smiles warmly, greeting Hannibal with professionalism, but also the ease of familiarity, like Hannibal is a common customer.

Ak Hannibal, he says, *good morning, I see you've brought the group.*

Yes, Hannibal returns, *please meet my dear friend Will, and his group members.*

Morning, Will says, surprised, and nodding slightly to compose himself, *we wanted to ask you about your clothes making process.*

Of course, the man nods, *I'm Christopher, I'm the eldest tailor here, and one of the only who are also an Ulima.*

"Good morning," Jack says, a little obnoxiously. He gives Will a look who in turn gives them a basic outline of what's going on, leaving out the part about being an Ulima, mostly because he doesn't want to deal with whatever Jack has to say about it.

"Can we see his wares?" Beverly asks, "are there any in progress?"

Oh, yes, Christopher replies when Will asks, *feel free to look at anything I have on display. I only have mending tools with me, anything I'm working on is at home.*

Once the information is relayed, Beverly immediately jumps on the hanging clothes, running her fingers through the furs and gently turning them to see the stitching. She moves from outer cloaks to the inner shirts, marvelling at the colours and textures present. Will finds himself once again translating questions and answers back and forth. Beverly asks about the way the clothes are made, the materials used to make them, and how long everything is expected to last. He's surprised to find Hannibal insert himself smoothly in at one point, answering questions about the wear of the clothes surprisingly honestly as he talks about how long they usually take to wear away.

I've bought clothes from Christopher many times, Hannibal admits, *I have a large selection at home.*

Will blinks, and looks him gently up and down, noticing the matching shirt and pants, with an outer jacket not as familiar as Will had assumed when they had met up earlier. It looks similar to his other ones, but the lining is a different colour and the fur looks coarser than the other.

"Stop gawking," Bev whispers, nudging him, "ask if we can see his mending tools. Or his making tools. Either one."

Christopher eagerly hands over some of his tools, placing them on the table. They're holding a broken pair of pants open, making it easier to reach the seam and sew it back together. Beverly gets out her camera to take photos of them, before asking for permission to touch them, which Christopher grants without a second thought.

Brian and Jimmy get dragged into her excitement, gently clicking things together with the enthusiasm of children getting a new toy. They work the equipment with nothing inside it, just to watch how it would work theoretically.

"I mean, we've only found pieces of this stuff," Bev enthuses, "this is incredible!"

"Do you think we could take some back?" Jimmy asks, "not just this, but any other tools?"

"It'll be on a case by case basis," Jack orders, leaning against the edge of the stall and watching his team play around with an unimpressed look, "and we can't take everything."

"But the equipment is so unique, it's surprisingly advanced," Bev grins, holding up the manual sewing machine shaped more like a cube than what Will is used to, "look, no electricity, so they've made a set of gears to create a faster sewing experience than you can get by hand!"

"Yes, yes," Jack sighs, "but this is just mending right? Will, can you ask about the other ones?"

Will nods, turning to Christopher, who is smiling at the team. *Can we also see your larger tools? For making the clothes?*

Of course, Christopher replies, still watching, *your friends are very curious, it is refreshing to see. These are simple tools, everyone I know has already seen them.* He takes a breath, and stands up straighter, holding his hand out for Beverly to place the tools she was holding in. She does so almost reluctantly, but the promise of more convinces her.

Christopher quickly packs his store mostly away and calls for someone to watch it. He goes to lead them to his house, Hannibal shadowing them. Christopher takes them to one of the townhouses, pushing the door open to his living room. Will watches him fuss around for a second, almost sheepishly pushing a half-finished cloak into a shelf as if to hide it.

I apologise for the mess, he says, scooping some papers away before Will can get a good look at them, *I got caught up in a project and forgot to tidy up.*

You didn't know we would come to your home, Will deflects, *though my friends will most likely not see the mess if you give them something to play with.*

Christopher laughs and pushes a larger stand further into the room. It looks to be a large vertical square, with hooks decorating it. Beverly lights up when she sees it, already attempting to use it while Will tries to figure out what it does.

"This is amazing," she breathes, pulling gently at one of the taught strings, "gorgeous workmanship."

As she gets out a camera, Brian finally stops looking like someone killed his cat and takes a genuine look at it. "Do you think he made it or was this the work of a carpenter?" He traces a finger along an edge, feeling where the wood was carved. Will follows in their investigation, rapping his knuckles gently against it and letting his eyes slip closed with the obvious love and care put into the piece. He runs his finger along a seam gently until he finds an embellishment. It looks like a ring of small pearls placed along the corner, but Will knows pearls are a lot shinier than the white-grey spheres nestled in the wood.

He brings his hand back sharply, the world coming into focus like a rubber band snapping. He blinks, but no one has seemed to notice his jerk. Bev is already shoving people away to get a good shot, Brian is teasing her about another coin flip but Will can't focus on it properly. He blinks images of bones forcefully out of his mind and lets himself drift back away from the tool.

He spots Hannibal and Christopher talking to each other in low voices, something serious and secretive that Will can't quite make out. They're talking too fast for him, too rushed with sentences being half complete and words switched out for others as if it were a code. Hannibal's eyes flick to him, and Will meets him head-on, looking just above his right eye.

Should I ask them to stop? he asks, cocking his head ever so slightly.

Your friends are fine, Christopher assures, *we were discussing Hannibal's newest collection I'm preparing.*

Collection, Will repeats, *you have collections of clothes?*

I do, Hannibal admits, a hint of sheepishness that barely pushes through, *Christopher is one of the only ones here who create my clothes, his workmanship is of a high standard.*

You've pretty much seen me in every piece of clothing I own, Will laughs, motioning to his own flannel shirt and khaki shorts.

Hannibal looks at him, following Will's motions. There's something shocked hiding in his expression, but he smooths it out. Christopher too follows the motions, though a little more interested, probably already thinking of a new collection.

If I may ask, the tailor says, *how are your clothes made? The texture looks different from what I'm used to.*

Um, Will hums, *let me get Beverly.* Thankfully Bev perks up at the sound of her name and trots over so Will can ask her how clothes are made.

“Oh, of course,” she replies when Will asks if she can answer their questions, “go ahead, I have some of my own anyway.” So Will is settled back into his position as a translator as the conversation flows onwards. He learns more than he ever needed to know about clothes, but Bev seems to be enjoying herself, and the team needs a win after this disastrous expedition.

Just before lunch, Christopher shoos them out with a promise to hand off any tools he can let go of if they stop by before dinner. The group spends the rest of the day slowly getting used to the city again, exploring past the track they’ve used from the rooms to Hannibal’s place and back.

Will gets drawn into their excitement, though he notices their trek stays purposefully away from the central temple and the blood streaks still visible on it. They eat lunch at a different stall and take the time to find a nice place to sit. Will feels his eyes wander to just above the farm, where he can’t see the cross of Peter’s grave but he likes to imagine he can.

“Do you think he’ll give us his odd little sewing machine?” Brian asks, “or maybe a smaller version of his massive making thing.”

“How are you a scientist?” Bev asks shaking her head, “massive making thing, huh.”

“Shut up,” Brian groans, turning to Will, “so what is he giving us?”

Will shrugs, “why would I know?”

“Cos you were talking with Christopher and Hannibal,” Bev shrugs back, “what else were you talking about then?”

“Collections of clothes,” Will admits, “Christopher is Hannibal’s tailor, so they were talking about his clothes and I jumped in while you guys were freaking out.”

“Huh,” Jimmy hums, “the clothes come in collections, like a suit?”

“That would be similar,” Bev admits, taking another bite of the meat skewer they’re having for lunch, “though their suits are different from ours. Obviously.”

“Obviously,” Jimmy agrees, “back to what we might get to bring home though,” and so the conversation ebbs and flows away from Will’s understanding. They finish their plate of skewers, and a stray comes up to their side to lick it clean. Will runs his hands through the dog’s fur, giving the dog a little scratch as it picks up the plate and hurries away with it.

They head back to Christopher’s booth, who helpfully gives them some tools that Will doesn’t even attempt to understand. Hannibal isn’t there and Will feels the sharp disappointment his hole leaves.

“Ready to head back for some ‘Caramel Blitz Bar’ dinner?” Bev asks, grinning at him with her hands full.

“You guys go ahead,” Will hums, “I’m going to take another second to travel around, you know?”

Bev blinks, “oh, sure. I’ll keep Jack occupied while you sneak off.” She gives him a wink and gives a half-wave as she ushers the team back down the path. Will watches them go, and then turns on his heel to trudge back towards the farm. He hops the fence, stepping carefully around the chickens that hum around his ankles, and stalks up the hill.

He flops to the ground once he reaches the top, resting his head on his hand as he gazes at Peter’s grave. It’s probably terrible he hasn’t been visited, he should get flowers or something. Peter would prefer an animal probably, just wait for a bird to nest in the tree above.

He spends ages just sitting there, pondering, letting his mind wander. He’s only pulled out of it when he hears someone’s steps coming up the hill behind him, and he runs an apology through his mind.

May I join you? Hannibal’s voice asks, gentle and soothing.

Sure, Will laughs, motioning to the ground beside him, *be my guest.*

Hannibal slides down beside him, for a second looking pained as his pants touch the dirt. *Some farmers noticed you up here, I wanted to make sure you were okay.*

Well, I’m fine, Will huffs, *just..thinking.*

Death is a powerful force, Hannibal murmurs, *a transformative force. Do you feel transformed?*

I feel grief, Peter was my friend, Will admits, *or at least, a very nice acquaintance.*

Even seeing strangers die, there is a darkness that can curl within us.

I wasn’t grieving when Clark was killed, Will spits, *I don’t grieve for him now.*

That is not the only darkness that can well inside of us, Hannibal says, looking at Will intently even though the other’s gaze is dropped to the ground, *it is not the only one that can bring comfort either.*

Darkness is inherently a negative thing.

Darkness can be welcoming, protective, Hannibal counters, *we can feel safe in its ambiguity. As easily hunted as a hunter, or perhaps something else entirely.*

There are no rules to fear if no one can see you break them, Will mutters.

What rules do you wish to break in the darkness, Will?

Will blinks, finally looking at him, *are you secretly a psychiatrist? What, going to ask about my mother next?* He laughs, though it feels strained, *perhaps you want to psychoanalyse

me.*

We are only having a friendly chat, Hannibal hums.

About the darkness in death and the rules we wish to break. Fairly dark for two friends, even if they are sitting above a grave.

Well, I never said it was a light discussion, Hannibal grins, and Will finds himself laughing. They settle into silence again as the wind blows and the sun tickles the horizon with intent to set. Will shivers against the cold biting at his back.

Come back to mine, Hannibal offers, *I cannot promise there will be no more talks of darkness, but I can promise warm food.*

That sounds nice, Will admits, watching Hannibal stand and taking the offered hand when it comes towards him. They walk back together, and Hannibal helps Will inside, back to the more personal rooms.

He gets served a leg with an outer clay shell that Hannibal breaks off. The meat inside is tender, and Hannibal gently pulls some apart to place a plate already served with roasted vegetables. He places it in front of Will first and then serves another for himself.

Will places the first bite in his mouth with intention and the taste bursts across his tongue. The next few bites come easier until he's finished. Will is then served a dessert, a pile of fruits and what looks like a gourmet pudding cup.

They retire after dinner to a lounge, with Hannibal serving them each a glass of wine as they sit by a fire.

Will takes a breath, and then slowly lets it out. *Sometimes I feel hunted,* he admits softly, *in the dark. I've never been much of a hunter.*

What are you instead? Hannibal asks mildly.

A fisher, Will hums, *I fish.*

You lure your prey, Hannibal smiles, *some would say that needs more skill than simply pursuing, a more patient mind. Knowledge of what kind of prey you are hoping for.*

I made lures for them when I was back home. It was calming, just wading into the stream.

There are streams here, Hannibal offers, *I would be happy to show you where, and if you would let me, gather materials for your lures. We may have materials for many types of prey.*

Perhaps, Will agrees, though he looks forward to fishing again, *would you say you're a hunter, Hannibal?*

Yes, Hannibal smiles, taking a sip of his drink, *I am used to hunting all kinds of prey, for food mostly,* he glances over, *very rarely simply for pleasure.*

For pleasure, Will smirks, *do you not eat everything?*

Dear Will, Hannibal murmurs, his voice a purr in the intimacy of the dark room, *I devour anything unfortunate enough to get in my grasp.*

Will feels himself heat, the tension between them strung tight enough to snap, though Hannibal looks no less relaxed than he did that morning. Will hides himself behind his cup, though he can feel Hannibal's eyes flicking over his profile.

Come, Hannibal offers after a few minutes of silence, *let's get you to bed.*

Will follows him down the hall until he gets to the guest room. He's reluctant to separate, but he knows it's probably for the best. Hannibal senses this and offers Will his coat once more. *It's cold,* he says, but they both know the real reason behind it. Will just wishes he were less of a coward, but one night apart may give him a better perception of what's happening.

He pulls the cloak around him and settles in for sleep, letting his eyes fall closed in the dark room. He doesn't feel hunted in the dark of the room, but he doesn't feel particularly like a hunter either. He feels like he's been lead to a trap, but he doesn't know if it will fall around him like a cage, or if he'll welcome whatever comes next.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I'm back, I hope everyone has had a happy Easter, and a good break (if you've had one). Super sorry for the late update, I was going to post on April 1st and then realized it was April fools and it then slipped my mind. Feel free to comment/kudos/anything, they give Will (and I) some happiness. I hope you enjoyed, and have a great day!

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Creation and destruction

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will doesn't wake startled, but the confusion from his dreams is new. There's no threatening aura, no monster waiting to strike, but his stalker is back. He felt the breath against his neck, the steps sounding behind him. He didn't dare look back in case there was nothing there and he was alone again. He was Orpheus, and Eurydice was a beast of his own making, but he was still in love. He just doesn't know what talent he offered to Hades to get them back.

Will cautiously pads out of his room and back down the small hallway to the kitchen, taking a second to rub his eyes. Hannibal is standing in the kitchen, contemplating his drawers and shelves. He turns as Will takes his first step in the room, smile stopped halfway as he spots Will's crumpled clothing. He looks him over and Will can sense the barely suppressed judgment.

Will shrugs, *you didn't bring me my bag, I don't have anything else to wear.* Hannibal blinks at him once, and then gives out a soft put upon sigh.

I suppose that is true, he says, *I have done you a great disservice. To remedy this, let me loan you some of my own collection.*

I don't know if your clothes will fit me, Will deflects, confused, but Hannibal is already gently leading him back down the hallway.

I believe they are some that will, he says, and steps inside his own bedroom. Will stands awkwardly in the doorway as Hannibal goes to his row of shelves and takes in the room. It's very decadent, with sculptures and art displayed throughout the room. There's a harp tucked into a corner and a strange sort of piano across from it. There are a few bookshelves, along with a desk with a few scattered papers and writing utensils on it.

Will feels himself take a few steps in the room, continuing when Hannibal merely continues on his search through clothes, and gently plucks a few notes out on the piano. It's really a warmup scale, but he gently flows it into one of the only tunes he knows.

Do you play? Hannibal asks once he runs out of steam, holding a pile of clothes in his arms.

No, Will admits, *I took a few lessons, can only play a few songs. I had one at home purely to gather dust.*

Well, it would be a delight if you played anything for me, Hannibal murmurs, before holding out the clothes, *I believe these will fit you. Feel free to change wherever you like, I'll be in the kitchen.*

Will feels too awkward to take up the unspoken offer of changing in Hannibal's room, so instead goes to his own. He strips quickly and takes the least colourful items from the pile to wear. They fit him almost perfectly, but still ever so slightly large in a comfortable way. They're honestly terribly plain, just how Will likes it, but Hannibal looks pleased when Will pads into the kitchen.

I guess we're closer in size than I thought, Will snarks, looking down at himself. He pauses at the sight of Hannibal's half-smirk and almost blushes, *did you have these made for me?*

Perhaps, Hannibal tilts his head in a nod, *I wanted to make sure you were comfortable here.*

Sure, Will laughs, *sure. Just tell me what we're making.* Hannibal tells him but the name goes in one ear and out the other. It's something super fancy though, Will can tell by the way there are too many words for the number of ingredients.

He gets on cutting whatever vegetables and fruits are handed to them, and at one point takes over stirring the sauce over the fire to make sure it doesn't become too thick. Hannibal takes over serving everything, but Will sets the table, and then they both sit down for breakfast. The taste bursts across Will's tongue as always and the food sits pleasantly within him.

What are the plans today? Hannibal asks mildly, using the little fork Will had set out to slice a piece and eat it.

I think similar to yesterday but with carpentry and pottery, Will replies easily, *I'll have to double-check with the team when we meet up.*

Perhaps you can collect more trinkets, Hannibal smirks, *your group will be too weighed down to travel if they continue their collection.*

The flying-cart won't be able to take off, Will laughs, *well, the "helicopter", that's what it's called.*

"Helicopter," Hannibal considers, *your language is intriguing.*

I could try and teach you some if you want? Will offers.

And so the pupil becomes the teacher, Hannibal smiles, *I would enjoy any lessons you wish to give me.*

We can give it a go tonight, Will hums, finishing off his plate. Hannibal collects it with his own and puts them both in the sink before they head out for the day. It's quite warm out, though Will's clothes feel softer and cooler than his others did, they don't stick to him with

sweat. He's still wearing his own boots, even though they clash against the rest of his outfit in an almost embarrassingly obvious way, if Will cared enough about stuff like that to be embarrassed.

The group is waiting on the path for him, and Bev's mouth almost drops open when she spots him. A strange expression crosses her features, half incredulous and half excited. There's an element of I-told-you-so, as well as some I-can't-believe-you! It's nothing compared to Jack's though, who looks a little murderous himself.

"Where were you?" He demands, "You can't just leave us without a way to communicate."

"I was fine," Will mutters, "and it looks like you were too. Are we still looking at pottery and carpentry?"

"Yes, and you would know that if you were where you were meant to be!" Jack looks thunderous, and Will lets it slide off him like the sun simply glancing off his back.

"I'll see if Hannibal has set anything up," he hums, turning on his heel to walk very obviously in the opposite direction of Hannibal. Jack watches him but it seems Will's retribution will come another time.

"Are these Hannibal's?" Are Beverly's first words, before she rapidly shakes her head to herself, "who am I kidding these were obviously made for you. How does it feel?"

"Fine," Will shrugs, "cooler than usual, feels like I'm always under shade."

"Interesting," Bev nods, only to get elbowed by Brian.

"Hey, it's time for me to nerd out, okay?" He huffs a breath, "or did you forget the promise of the coin flip."

"I thought I cheated?" Bev snarks back.

"So you admit it!" Brian crows, and Will gently removes himself from the conversational strings, instead letting Jimmy and Jack pick up whatever he leaves behind. He strolls over to Hannibal, waiting for him while his team takes a second to wind down from the squabble.

Well, Hannibal begins when they are finally joined by the team, *here is Patti, one of our masters in pottery, and Matthew, our expert in woodworking. Jaro sculpts glass, but he is unfortunately unavailable at the moment. He sends his deepest apologies, as well as these,* Hannibal holds out a hand as Will translates and the team gathers around to see a collection of little glass figurines. They scramble to select one of the fantastical animals each, dogs with long necks and cats with twisted horns. Hannibal holds a different one out to Will, a smoky glass stag with markings like feathers. *I had him design this one for you,* Hannibal admits as he hands it over, *I thought you might like to take it with you.*

Will takes it with a mumbled thanks, transfixed by his beast in solid form. No more hoofbeats behind his eyes, here it is, in front of him. It feels haunting, and Will is sucked in by its simple existence.

He doesn't realise he's zoned out until he gets a gentle nudge from Brian. "Ask Matthew about the stuff Christopher was using, did he make it?" Will turns to do just that, gently slipping the trinket into his pocket, making sure it stays safe. He learns that Matthew makes anything requiring significant skill, either aesthetically or physically. The team soaks up any knowledge Will can translate for them and are eventually task themselves with gently pulling apart anything Matthew will give up.

Will watches as they take turns using the carving machines, and compare the wood feel with the ones at home. They take photos of everything, and Matthew even lets them try sanding down a piece. Much like yesterday, they seem completely enveloped in documenting everything, experiencing as much as possible. Will can understand it, but he's perfectly fine standing off to the side.

Jack seems to notice, as he beckons Will over. "Go check up on Pat, or whoever, the pottery person. Make sure they're ready for us when we want to go over."

"Sure," Will agrees easily, casting one last look at the team in case something is about to go terribly wrong, and then leaves. Thankfully the pottery place is right next door, as evidenced by the multitude of vases and crockery laying at a stall.

Good morning, Will calls gently, watching as the woman puts a pot down and smiles at him. It turns a little nervous as she takes in his appearance, turning brittle around the edges.

Good morning, she returns, bowing ever so sightly, *what brings you here?*

I'm scouting ahead for my team, Will admits, *making sure you're ready for them when they come in.* He peers around at the shop and catches sight of some half-finished sculptures. The shape looks almost familiar, two large human-shaped blobs, a younger child figure and a medium-size dog.

Patti hastily casts a cloth over the sculpture, obscuring any more details Will could glean from it. *I am terribly sorry, Mosurre, but that is not finished yet. You cannot see it.*

That's okay, Will admits, taking a step backwards before pausing, *that word, moh-soo-ray, I've only heard Hannibal say it and he won't tell me what it means.* She pales a little, swallowing deeply for a second.

I'm very sorry, she says, *I misspoke, obviously. I was unaware that Ak Hannibal hadn't… * she trails off nervously, going to busy herself with some small plates.

But what does the word mean? Will presses, *even if you didn't mean to say it, I just want to know.*

Forget I said it, Patti murmurs, *I was out of line, the gossip flies here you know, I let it get away from me.*

There's gossip about me? Will asks, watching her expression shift, *about me and… Hannibal?*

Forget it, please, she rushes to him, almost to grab his hands but he flinches away on instinct, *don't mention it, I was foolish for saying it, I-*

Is everything all right? Hannibal interrupts, smoothly placing himself in the conversation. He settles a hand onto Will's shoulder to steady him and leaves it there as a comforting weight.

Of course, Will deflects immediately, before softening, *just saw an unfinished sculpture, it's a surprise for someone apparently, shouldn't go spreading it around.* He sends a tight smile to Patti, who sends a similar one back, though much more relieved.

Yes, she hums, *Ak Hannibal, perhaps you would like to see some of the serving platters I have made. I believe you could fit a whole leg on them.* Her false cheer is obvious, but Hannibal follows along with practised grace. He goes to look at the plates, which do indeed look long enough for Will to lay his leg over it and still have room for some more. There are patterns etched into the plate, leaves and feathers around the edge, with the swirls of a tree sitting in the centre spreading outwards. Will can't help but imagine the way a thick sauce would fill those valleys, painting in the design as the blood did on the pyramid.

Patti and Hannibal move to smaller plates, looking over the designs and talking about getting them duplicated for a dinner party. Will watches them both, following Patti with keen eyes as she slowly relaxes.

The rest of the team make their way over, hands overflowing with trinkets and tools. Patti offers them a cloth bag to tip them in, one she regularly puts pots in to protect them from being dropped, and the scientists thank her profusely. She continues to show them her own wares, letting Brian and Jimmy poke at a specific pot for five minutes. It looks almost identical to the one they had been observing that first day, only more professionally decorated.

She shows them some others, pots, cups, plates, and anything else she had on hand. They ask questions about the designs and Will translates between them easily. The group poke and prod at instruments, and Patti even lets them test some out on some spare clay. She jokingly mentions having it fired properly for them, and they seem too excited about the prospect.

The cloth bag gets fuller as they continue their search, including a few actual plates and bowls.

"We'll pretend our protein bars are fancy," Beverly smiles, holding a patterned bowl to her chest. There's a smattering of leaves around the rim, spiralling around to the centre.

"We can display them," Brian nods, "put them up like you see in rich people's houses," he motions stacking them up in his own bowl, a shade of deep blue with swirls to mimic the wind or the sea. Will can imagine them doing that, can imagine the scene fitting in at Hannibal's house.

Jack refuses to take anything and only watches as the group struggles to carry the bag and their new pottery between them. Will has to dive in at one point, slowing a bowl's descent enough to prevent it from smashing onto the ground, and it instead lands with a heavy thunk.

That brings a dangerous glint to the group's eyes, one that suggests that pots will be smashed in the future.

They have lunch together, licking sweet sauce off their fingers as they sit around. Hannibal joins them, though he picks at his food in a much more refined manner than anyone else can manage. Will tries to emulate his motions, but he can't avoid having drips run down his wrist. He ends up having to lick them off, much to Hannibal's displeasure if the way he was staring at the motion was any indication. Thankfully Winston appears to spare him any further humiliation and licks any residue off before Hannibal can take serious offence.

Beverly and Jimmy ruffle Winston's fur, with Brian taking to scratching his head in between mouthfuls. Jack even takes a second to pat the sides of Winston's body, letting him huff underneath his hand. When they leave Winston trots back to Will. He stays seated while the group leave to inspect their bounty more closely and continues to run his fingers through Winston's fur.

The dog follows Hannibal and Will as they continue on a much more informal walk around the stalls, having a less invasive look at anything of interest. Most of it is work for hobbies or skills, producing items that people can use to knit or paint.

Hannibal leads him to a stall bursting with brightly coloured feathers, the stallholder absent.

You mentioned creating lures, Hannibal tells him, *I organised for some samples of materials, you may pick whichever you wish.*

Will blinks at him, before hurriedly refusing. *I can't just take them,* he argues, *and what would I use them for?*

For art, Hannibal rebuts easily, *and don't worry, the stallholders will be reimbursed for anything you wish to take.* He sweeps a gesture out and Will notices the surrounding shops are also strangely void of life. Instead, stalls of string, metal hooks, fur, and other colourful bits and bobs decorate the area. No one is even shopping here.

Will cautiously reaches out to trail his finger across the arch of a feather, testing the feel of it against his skin. He goes on to another, bright blue with a dark inner core, and another with bright reds moving into pinks. They're odd, nothing he's seen before, but they will make some beautiful lures.

He goes around, taking a few feathers, a few hooks, a line of string and several spools in different colours. He imagines what they'll look like, the way the pieces will fit together perfectly. Winston takes a feather to chew on, and Will grabs another handful of supplies to create some sort of dog toy. He doesn't know how it will work out, but something in him wants to try.

Hannibal lets him grab whatever he wants, insisting that anything he chooses can be paid for, and will be paid for. He simply hums when Will asks for the third time if he's sure it's okay and doesn't let him know how much everything actually costs. Judging by the size and colour of some of his feathers, he can imagine it's a lot.

They retire back to Hannibal's for the evening, and Will lays out his materials, sorting them into piles of his own making. He's mourning the fact that he can't make them then and there when Hannibal unveils his second surprise of the evening.

I believe these are what our fishers use, Hannibal says, handing Will a box which he opens with confusion. Inside are almost replicas of his own tools, but instead of metal and wood, they are made of what seems to be solid silver. They look extravagant, something terribly expensive.

Will swallows, *Hannibal, I can't accept this.* He attempts to hand it back but Hannibal simply pushes it back into his hands.

You can, he says, *and you should. I want you to have something to create your art with, I want to see what you make, and how you make it.*

But I can't pay you back for this, Will insists.

Your company is plenty enough, Hannibal returns easily, smoothly, *the only payment I want is to be able to see you flourish.*

With that settled, Will takes to making a lure. He sets everything out on a table and puts it all together, a bright red feather with twine and a hook. Hannibal watches intently as he puts it all together, and Will takes to showing him how it's done. He can almost declare it finished, but he knows it's not.

Needs more weight, Will hums, *I'll fix it tomorrow, it's no big deal.*

Perhaps, Hannibal murmurs, reaching up on his shelf and plucking a single chunk of something, *will this do?*

Will takes it, turning it over in his palm, and nods. *Yeah, this'll do perfectly.* As he twines it into the lure he thinks. Hannibal is a steady weight next to him, and Will simply soaks in his presence. When he shows Hannibal, the sharp glint in the other's eye makes Will want to stay forever.

He sleeps in the guest room that night, Hannibal's cloak resting over his shoulders and his lure set on the bedside table. It's absurd, to think he'd be so comfortable with it in the room, but its presence brings him sort of peace. He hadn't realised how perfectly Clark's bones would fit in a lure.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I'm back!! I just want to say a massive thank you to everyone reading (we hit 3000!!), especially those commenting, I read them all and I love y'all! Something I forgot to mention last time, but all the OCs are named after people from Hannibal, like set designers and costume designers, so Christopher was a costume designer and the

three mentioned here did set design. (also can you see that I had finished playing Hades for days straight when I wrote this chapter?) Anyway, once again thank you for engaging with this story in any way, feel free to continue doing that, and have a great day!

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

A look at the past, and the possibilities of the future.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His dreams aren't concerning, nothing that drives him further into insanity. That's not to say he didn't dream, they just didn't leave him fighting his beating heart. He woke content, safe, the flashes of his mind's creation bringing him only longing and a sense of peace.

He stumbles out of his room, almost drunk on the feeling. He's changed into another pair of gifted clothing, feeling confident enough to put on a blue top this time. The colour is deep, and Will vaguely wonders if he'll feel warmer because of it.

Hannibal is in the kitchen, with Winston keeping close under his heels. Something is cooking on the fire, and Will can smell the soft scent wafting through the kitchen. It's terribly domestic, and Will feels emotion bubble up in his chest, ready to spurt out his mouth.

Good morning, Hannibal greets, *I had planned on waking you so we could cook together, but I wanted to let you rest.*

Thank you, Will says, meaning more than words can allow, *what are you cooking?* He steps closer to look at it, lining himself up with Hannibal, only a step away from touching him.

Baked sweet-cakes with a berry reduction and cream, Hannibal offers, whisking something dark in a bowl, *I must admit I am curious as to how you would say it in your own language.*

"Pancakes with berries, and cream," Will offers, *though that is because I'm pretty sure that's what I know it as.*

"Pancakes," Hannibal repeats as he serves it up, "with berries and cream," he places a leaf on top of each one, and brings them over to the table, almost purposely brushing Will as he passes. Winston follows eagerly, and Will is amused to see Hannibal gently slip him a bite of something. *Breakfast is served,* he says as he sits.

Will follows suit and begins cutting into his breakfast. *It's delicious,* he compliments after his first mouthful, and Hannibal smiles at him.

I'm glad you think so, he says softly, *though I think it is missing the magic of your hands.*

I doubt I was making the dishes better, Will rebuts easily, playfully, *I think the magic touch is all you.*

Agree to disagree, Hannibal offers, *though speaking of things we share, I wanted to continue our conversation from yesterday if you would still be open to teaching me your language as you have learnt ours?*

I'm not a teacher, Will considers, *but I have some books if you want to struggle through them, or I can simply tell you words as you want them, sentence structure, stuff like that.*

If you have a book I could borrow I would enjoy it, Hannibal replies evenly, *even if I don't understand it. Otherwise, I am confident in your ability to teach me words as I ask for them.*

You shouldn't be, Will mutters, *but I'll give it a go.*

Can we start with you explaining my dish to me? I feel that would be an excellent place to begin, Hannibal offers, motioning to the half-finished plates.

Well, Will hums, *this is the "pancake", this part is the "cream", and this is the "berry sauce". Or, "berry reduction" as you called it.*

Ah, Hannibal murmurs, looking over his plate as if to memorise the words, *and how would you describe your favourite meal?*

"Crawfish pie," Will says, before explaining, *it's a pie, filled with crawfish and vegetables, usually bell peppers. My dad would put anything we had leftover in it, really, sometimes it didn't turn out great.*

"A crawfish pie," Hannibal repeats absentmindedly, *Crawfish and peppers. Did you have it often?*

It was all my dad really knew how to cook, Will admits with a smile, *and my mother was never really around.*

Ah, no need to ask about your relationship with your mother then, Hannibal grins, sharp and shark-like.

'Cos I said you were like a psychiatrist, right, Will laughs, *I stand by it though, you've got that look about you.* He points his knife at Hannibal, who simply turns his smile a little softer.

Speaking of looking, Hannibal says, letting the knife hang between them, *do you know if your team has any plans for today?*

They might, Will hums, placing the knife back down on his plate, *I'll have to ask them when we meet back up again after this,* he cocks his head to the side in thought, *although I

think the only one we haven't checked out yet is Jimmy's expertise, the cemetery, as long as that's okay?*

It will be fine, Hannibal assures him. They wash the plates together, Will drying them off as Hannibal hands them to him, and when everything is put back Will calls Winston over to follow him as they leave. Walking through the town with Hannibal at his side and Winston under his feet soothes a part of him he hadn't realised existed, too used to its sharp edges dragging through his chest to remember when it started.

They head down the path, spotting the rest of Will's team as they stand around a food cart, licking the residue of breakfast from their fingers and lips.

"Morning," Bev calls out happily as they approach, obviously taking a second to look at what Will's wearing again.

"Morning," Will returns, "what happened to presenting the breakfast bars?"

"They're presented," Brian pipes up, "presented and then ignored."

"Need to flush my system of their taste before I even think of going back," Bev agrees, shaking her head in mild disgust, "and it was easier than we thought to grab some breakfast, can you thank the stallholder for us?"

The stallholder is watching them with an amused smile. *Thank you,* Will tells them, *my friends liked your food.*

It's no problem, they say, *they were perfectly nice to talk to, although I couldn't understand a word of it.*

That is how it goes, Will says, nodding along, thankful when the stallholder lets the conversation drop and instead goes to talk to Hannibal. They talk about food for a while, Will watching intently as Hannibal explains how to make a particular bread dish, though the words fall out of his head as soon as they enter.

"Hey," Jimmy says, coming to a stop at his side, "Bev and Brian got to see their stuff, can you ask Hannibal if the cemetery is still free?"

"I asked him about it this morning," Will replies, "it should be fine."

"Oh thank goodness," Jimmy gasps dramatically, "I was getting jealous of Brian and Bev, thought maybe Hannibal didn't like me or something. I'm not even going to take anything off their land, unlike those two thieves."

"Freely given!" Bev pipes up, "it was freely given items, we stole nothing."

"Oh, yeah of course," Jimmy drawls, sarcasm in every syllable.

"Did you want to go to the cemetery, or do you want to argue with us?" Bev shoots back, and Jimmy visibly drops the topic.

“I’ll double-check,” Will offers, already taking a step towards Hannibal. He agrees, of course, and leads the group down to a slightly lower spot of town, where a field rolls in front of them dotted with flowers and stones.

“Gravestones,” Jimmy marvels, already hurrying past to talk a look at the closest one. He places his feet carefully once he gets close, and crouches down to inspect the inscription. The rest of the team wait with bated breath in case Jimmy has overstepped, but when neither Hannibal nor Jack does anything to stop him they too run down the hill. Will meanders behind, Hannibal following him as they take a look around.

Spread across the field are hundreds of stones, almost like gravestones but less flat. They are each engraved with words, names and simple sentences it seems. There are groups of families, but overall the structure seems less strict, messier than Will is used to. It’s almost a direct contrast to the town.

“What’s this one say?” Jimmy asks, pointing to the nearby stone, the beginnings of a vine climbing up its side.

“It’s a grave for someone named Bryan,” Will says, looking over the stone, “underneath it says ‘a creator and friend’.”

“Are there dates?” Jimmy asks, jotting something down in his little notebook.

“No,” Will says, “not that I can see.” It’s strange, that no matter where he looks on this rock, there is no time of death, no time of birth. He turns to Hannibal, *where is his time of death?* he asks, *or his birthday?*

We don’t keep a record of it, Hannibal tells him, *the soul is eternal, our death is not the end of our life, nor is our birth the beginning. When the soul is reborn I will know, it is easy to tell if you know them well enough.*

We don’t see it that way, Will shares, *we see the soul as part of the body, and when the body dies the soul goes away somewhere. It depends on what you believe but that’s the basics of it.*

I’ve seen people be reborn, many times. I knew Abigail long ago, and I know her now, he hums, *the soul carries the same decisions with it, its a shame she’s had to suffer every time I see her.*

Will considers it, Abigail is young, Hannibal has probably seen her grow up from youth, but how could he have seen her before that except as an older woman? He doesn’t really want to ask, too worried to be found insulting their beliefs.

The more qualified scientists walk gently between headstones, having a look around at the various stages of decay. There are few brand new ones, most having been partially grown over or almost completely covered in green.

They ask Will about them every now and again, ones that look more decorated and one’s that look more rundown.

“Do you think Clark is here somewhere?” Brian asks, “because, not to encourage vandalism, but I would enjoy kicking his gravestone right about now.”

“He probably isn’t,” Will shrugs, “his body has been used, there wouldn’t be enough to bury.”

There’s thick silence for a beat before Bev breaks it with a snort. “Would I be a terrible person if I say I kind of like that?”

“Not any more terrible than anyone else here,” Brian shrugs, looking similarly hesitant about his acceptance.

“What about a grave for past chiefs,” Jack asks, some of his first words spoken, “any of them here?”

“I’d have to have a look around,” Will offers, “but I don’t know if there will be.”

“Because their bodies have been used up,” Jack grunts, looking out over the field, “killed like Clark was.”

“You think Hannibal killed the last chief to rise to power?” Bev asks, “that’s a wild assumption.”

“He’s killed before,” Jack rebuts.

“People who committed crimes, like murdering others,” Bev says, “if he killed someone, it was someone like Clark.”

“And they might have destroyed any when Hannibal was born,” Will adds, “not to remove their heritage or anything, but Hannibal said that they believe in reincarnation, that when a soul dies they are reborn in someone else.”

“When the chief dies, his soul is reborn into the new chief,” Brian nods, “so you don’t need a gravestone, and he’s important enough to warrant the destruction of his own, to prove he’s alive, or whatever.”

“Or maybe it’s over there,” Jimmy suggests, pointing to something they can’t see over a slight bump in the relatively flat field. They walk over and see that just after the field rises, it abruptly dips into a valley. Nestled between the hill they’re on and the one across from them are two buildings, so close together they’re almost one.

The buildings are decorated in fine engravings, glitters of gold and jewels sparking across Will’s eyes. There are two doors, both shut hard against their frames, and there are no windows in. Leaves and vines climb up the side, not as uncontrolled as the one’s in the field, but enough to make it look rundown. They almost look European, shaped like a very tiny cathedral, but lacking the ornate glass windows.

Perhaps most surprisingly are the enormous antlers that pierce through the ground. It’s like a deer lays dormant underneath, buried only enough to cover the top of its head. They tower over the buildings, launching up into the sky far enough to just not be seen from the entrance

to the cemetery, and can be presumed as pointy rocks when standing a little further in. They are massive though, wide and curved like a fence, protecting the two buildings nestled within.

It looks almost holy, something untouchable, and even the scientists falter, hesitating.

“Can we go there?” Jimmy asks, “I’ve never seen anything like this. It’s a very odd burial ground.”

Hannibal glides to stand beside them, and a certain sadness drops just behind his mask. *Please refrain from going down there, those are very special burial grounds.*

Will gives a shake of his head to the group, and they take the hint and slinking back away. *Can I ask who is laid there?* Will cautions, looking out over the valley.

Two people very dear to me, Hannibal admits, *one has returned many times, the other-* he lets out the softest of sighs, *-my sister has never been reborn. Her soul was destroyed, there’s nothing to be remade.*

Oh, Will says, a little lost, shocked into glancing over at the chief.

I keep her with me, a part of her, Hannibal explains, *but having a physical way to respect her has allowed me a way to be sure she will be honoured.*

And the other? Will asks, *if they keep coming back why do you put them next to someone who never will?*

I care for them both equally, I will always carry parts of both of them, Hannibal admits, *it may be selfish to have both my beloved separated and exulted, but it has been done. I treasure every meeting with them and will continue to do so.* He looks over then, meeting Will’s eyes for just a moment before Will moves his gaze just to the left. *Come,* Hannibal says after a beat of silence, *let’s ensure your friends have not destroyed anything.*

Thankfully the team hasn’t, all the stones are exactly as they left them, except for a leaf or two missing around the edges where they’ve taken samples. Their camera is full of photos, and Will has a feeling he’ll be needed to translate a lot more in the coming days. Perhaps he should loan them a book so he doesn’t have to spend hours repeating names and engravings.

Jimmy does sneak a photo of the more significant graves, but he doesn’t go any closer than they were before. Hannibal watches him do it, but doesn’t object as long as Jimmy doesn’t go down the valley. His camera can zoom in far enough though, to capture details their eyes can’t even see. He tucks the camera away, and with that the group heads out to dinner, lunch having passed as they explored. They had eaten some extra bars the group had packed, though Hannibal had politely refused the packaged goods. He looked almost like he might prefer eating the dirt on the ground rather than let the bar cross his lips, and Will can’t help but agree.

When they step back out of the cemetery Winston is there, ready for Will to drag fingers through his fur in a pet. Jack is dragged away by the team who are insistent on needing his

help in looking over the many samples and photos they've gathered over the last few days, leaving Will and Hannibal to walk back on their own. Will doesn't feel inclined to stop and look around, and so they continue on, heading back to Hannibal's house.

Winston follows them inside, thankfully not dragging in any dirt, and flops down in front of one of the softer seats, as if waiting for someone to sit in it. Will follows Hannibal into the kitchen, ready to help with anything he needs.

I had hoped to surprise you, Hannibal explains as he takes something out of a cabinet, *but I think you will appreciate it more if you help me.* He sets it down on the table and Will can see it's a small tray lined with some sort of pastry. Next to it lay a collection of ingredients in a bowl, most notably bright red bell peppers and crawfish.

Hannibal, Will breathes, almost choked with emotion, *this is- I-*

Please, Hannibal replies, *you've offered so much of yourself over to our ways, let me indulge you, just this once.* He comes over, steadying Will with a gentle hand on his shoulder. It brings them closer standing right next to each other in a way that lets Will feel the others body heat.

Will's breath hitches, and before he can stop himself he tilts his head just so and their lips brush. Suddenly his lips are being covered with Hannibal's, and a thumb is dragging gently across his chin. He lets his eyes flutter closed and loses himself in the feel of Hannibal against his lips.

They have slightly overcooked crawfish pie that night, Will kept dragging Hannibal away from the fire with tentative kisses that quickly turn more confident. The bits inside are cut at all sorts of odd angles, and the plating has the slightest of smudges, but it still tastes perfect. They have a simple cake for dessert, and Will takes pleasure in dragging Hannibal to eat it with him on the long soft bench. They make sure not to spill any crumbs onto the fabric, and Will lets Winston lick the crumbs from the plate.

They don't sleep separately, instead Hannibal tugs Will to his own room, and they lay down together there. He drapes furs and blankets over them, and instead of the robe, Will has Hannibal himself drape an arm over his shoulder. They link their fingers together ever so tenderly, a tentative touch that holds them together. Will falls asleep as a soft kiss is pressed to the back of his neck and a whisper against his skin.

Chapter End Notes

HA HA! It happens! Sorry if this seemed rushed to anyone, (I say on chapter 11), I got a little impatient myself. I'm sure there are enough clues to piece together what exactly is happening with Hannibal but I'll leave it in suspense for a little bit. Also, I'm not at all familiar with any American culture so I hope that Crawfish Pie is an actual thing, I looked it up on recipe sites and cross referenced it with Will's place of birth but google

may have led me astray, if it's terribly story breaking please let me know! Once again, thank you to everyone who comments/kudos/bookmarks, or even just has a read, you are all super amazing. I hope you enjoyed, and have a great day!

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

A vile little man arrives.

Chapter Notes

Quick TW: Mason is terrible. He's sexist, ableist, he's racist towards Hannibal's tribe (he believes they're inferior), and he mentions Peter's death very insensitively. Just proceed with caution if you think you need to, and if you need to skip anything feel free to ask for a summary!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is startled awake by what sounds like thunder. He jerks up, rolling out of bed quickly before realising he’s alone in the room. His dreams scatter out into the air, all good feeling from them released. The sounds continue overhead, though it seems to be moving away. Will cautiously exits the bedroom, walking down the hall barefoot until he comes across Hannibal, who looks to have just freshly changed.

Did you hear that? Will asks, looking up as if he could see through the ceiling.

Yes, and I saw it, Hannibal explains, *it was a massive black box, with spinning blades. A “helicopter”, I believe?*

Yeah, yeah, Will scrubs a hand over his face, *yeah, that would be Mason.* He sighs, *I was hoping he wouldn’t come for at least a little while longer.* Truth is, he was sort of hoping Mason wouldn’t come at all.

They get ready, Will getting dressed in something new because his clothes from the previous day had disappeared into thin air sometime after getting into bed and before getting up. He suspects Hannibal had a hand in it but doesn’t really mind. Thankfully Hannibal hadn’t started cooking yet, and so they grab some finger food on the way, one chosen by Hannibal that sends drips running down Will’s hands again.

The team is already up and ready, looking similarly frazzled by the early morning. Will easily slips in with them, standing in between Jack and Hannibal, ready for whatever Mason decides will be the topic of conversation.

The sound of the helicopter slows and then stops, leaving the group in tense silence.

“Showtime, everyone,” Bev mutters, obviously nervous about Mason’s approaching appearance.

Did you send out people to meet him like you did with us? Will asks, turning his head just enough to see Hannibal out of the corner of his eye.

Yes, Hannibal admits, *though I expect he will have a much harder time with them.*

As entertaining as that is, they should probably be careful, Will says, *I don’t know how violent Mason will be if provoked.* As if to prove his point, not a second later a gunshot rings out through the forest and everyone freezes.

Will tenses, ready to spring forward, but a hand on his shoulder stops him. Hannibal looks similarly concerned but holds his ground. They wait in tense silence, until Mason bursts through the tree line grumbling and muttering, another man by his side and a group of (thankfully unharmed) soldiers surrounding him.

“Mason,” Jack greets, walking forward to properly address the other.

“Jack,” Mason drawls, smoothing his hair, “I’m glad to see you're all still alive,” he casts his eyes over the group standing behind Jack and smirks, “well, most of you.”

“Peter was murdered,” Jack tells him, barely stumbling over the words, “the killer was caught though.”

“Well, all’s well that ends well,” Mason says, shrugging, “besides, I brought someone myself, meet my good friend Cordell.” He motions to the man next to him, someone that reminds Will of a shrew hiding as a shark. He looks over the group with keen eyes, clearly looking for something, and settles on Hannibal. “That’s why I picked him anyway,” Mason continues, “I mean, no family to notify. Though of course terribly sad.” He grins, like he’s told a joke, and doesn’t really care that no one else is laughing.

Jack clears his throat awkwardly before surging onwards, “we’ve collected various samples and lots of information about the culture, we’re ready to leave when you are.”

“Leave?” Mason asks, “but I just got here! I still haven’t gotten to ask my questions, look at the stuff I want to see. Like the pigs.”

“Pigs?” Jack questions, only for Mason to sidestep around him and walk up to Will.

“Can you ask the chief if we can see the farms? Pigs specifically, they’re my speciality, you know. And after my whore of a sister ran off with her bitch of a wife I’ve decided to expand my expertise,” his grin turns sharper, “well, ask him.”

Mason wants to know if he can see the pigs, Will asks Hannibal, trying to convey how confused he is, *would that be-*

“Come on,” Mason snaps, “it was a short question. ‘Can we see the pigs?’ That’s it.”

“The language is more complex than English, it will take me longer to ask things,” Will explains, already reaching the end of his rope.

“Can we see the pigs or not?” Mason asks, before barrelling forward, “never mind, we can do that later. Just, let's settle into our rooms. We’ve got ages to sightsee, as long as I want, really.” He snorts a laugh, not so unlike the pigs he so adores, and strolls past them. He pauses and looks back at them, beckoning for them to follow him, and so they do.

He’s an irritable little man, Hannibal murmurs, glancing between where Jack is trying to show Mason where the rooms are and where the science group is keeping a careful distance from Cordell’s glowering figure.

Yes, Will agrees with a sigh, *though he’s the reason we’re here in the first place, and until he’s had his fill we can’t really do anything.*

Hannibal hums, *as much as he is to be thanked for bringing you here, he is…*

Disgusting? Will questions, tilting his head towards the other.

I was going to say rude, but your description is accurate, Hannibal allows, meeting his eyes for a second, *should you join the rest of your group? I expect he’ll demand your skills once more.*

Unfortunately, Will sighs again, *I’ll see you later tonight.* He pauses, nervous to do anything but aware there’s an expectation for something. They’re in a relationship, sort of, mostly, but Will doesn’t feel comfortable letting the random people on the street see them like that.

Hannibal seems to sense it, giving him a gentle smile and a gentle squeeze on his shoulder. *I’ll have dinner waiting,* is all he says. Will gives him a little smile and trots off quickly to catch up with the rest of his team.

He finds them arguing with Mason about his room, trying to shuffle people around until there’s enough room for Mason and Cordell to have their own. Bev, Brian and Jimmy are arguing about sharing on all together when Will approaches, nothing they’ve left his room out of the conversation.

“I’m not using mine,” he offers, pointing vaguely to his door down the hallway. All heads turn towards it, and Mason cocks his head.

“That’ll do nicely, and Cordell can take over whoever is sleeping next door,” Mason grins, already pushing the door open. Will rushes to get his own bag, gently placing his bowl on top, careful not to let it get broken. Mason barrels over him, setting his stuff up whatever way he pleases, thankfully missing the deep gouges in the door.

“So where will you sleep then?” Jack asks, watching idly as Mason directs Cordell to move the dresser.

“I’m staying with Hannibal,” Will offers back, holding his bag in his hands, “he wants to learn some English.”

“He wants to learn our language?” Jack asks, lifting an eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Will shrugs, “I think it would be good, make it easier to communicate. He told me the helicopter was coming this morning, using the word helicopter.”

Jack hums, but before he can say anything more Mason orders him to help move the bed to be more to his liking. Bev takes the opportunity to pounce, coming up next to Will and grinning at him.

“Staying over at Hannibal’s huh?” She asks with a wink, her face quickly turning to shock as Will’s only answer is to blush. “No-“ she gasps.

“We’re not, uh, super serious yet,” Will defends quietly.

Bev guffaws, an actual snort leaving her, “he’s been flirting with you from day one! He let you sleep with his prize possession in his bed!”

“It was a guest bed,” Will mutters.

“Will, you dog, I can not believe you!” She sighs, “And here I was hoping I would be able to hit that at some point, at least it is my dearest friend, who will happily set me up with some of the hot officials.”

“What’s this about friends?” Brian asks, eagerly trying to get out of being a mover for Mason.

“Will is sleeping with Hannibal,” Bev sing songs.

Brian tilts his head and blinks, “well, I mean, I can see it. Not exactly shocked but wasn’t expecting it either.”

“We haven’t had sex,” Will deadpans, “listen we barely even kissed, okay, it’s not a big deal.”

“Oh, honey,” Bev sighs, “he’s been doting on you the whole time we’ve been here.”

“Is Will, resident broken-brain, dating someone?” Mason asks, coming to stand with them all, only half paying attention.

“He’s hooking up with the chief,” Brian says, throwing Will under the bus. Bev whacks him on the head.

“We’re not hooking up,” Will defends, “we’re just friends.”

“He let you sleep in his cloak, it’s literally part of his soul,” Brian shoots back, only to be hit again by Bev, who rapidly motions for him to shut up. “I thought we were talking about this?” He hisses to her.

“Their soul is in a cloak?” Mason asks, “what is it made of their skin or something?” That’s actually a good question, Will should look into that. It honestly wouldn’t surprise him at this point.

“It’s made of gold,” Bev enthuses, anxious to both show off her knowledge and to frantically move the conversation away from Will, who’s thankful for the distraction from his barely surviving love life. “Silk, jewels, stuff like that. It would be worth thousands, perhaps millions, if you convert it to our standards.”

“I should get one, don’t you think,” Mason says, tapping a finger against his chin, “hey, Cordell, did we bring any cash?”

“No,” Cordell replies, settling a chair into place, “only the things in your wallet.”

“Shame,” Mason sighs, “though, they won’t know the difference between a twenty and a thousand so it’ll be fine.” He looks back over the room, nodding at the state of it, “well, let’s go do some sightseeing.”

He leads them all back out onto the street, leading them in a twisting pattern around the stalls. He seems particularly interested in anything even remotely valuable, though his attention seems stuck on the things covered in gold or jewels.

He stops in front of the farms, eagerly looking at the animals scattered around. He almost climbs over a fence before both Cordell and a few farmers get him back down to his own side.

Sorry, Will apologises, *he’s eager to see the pigs.*

Ah, no worries, one of the farmers returns easily, opening a gate to lead the group through, *here, our pigs are just over there, you should talk to Randall if you want specifics, he knows the most about the animals.*

He wasn’t here last time, was he? Will asks, not remembering anyone specific.

The farmer shrugs, *he comes and goes, sometimes he joins the hunters, sometimes he tends to the animals. He thinks like them, enjoys becoming them.* There’s a confused tilt in their voice, an acceptance of something she doesn’t quite understand.

“C’mon,” Mason sighs, “can we see them yet or not?”

Will sighs, pointing the group down the track to the pig field. When they get there Will can easily pick out Randall, who is rolling around in the mud with some piglets, teeth bared in a playfully threatening manner. His head shoots up as they approach, and Will can imagine his fur prickling up at the strangers. Will almost instinctively loosens himself, dropping into the headspace he uses for strays, and it seems to have a similar effect as Randall evaluates him with intelligent eyes.

You’re the, he waves his hand, gently rolling a pig away as it squeals at him, *yeah? Good with dogs?*

Yeah, Will admits, watching as he stands, animal-like in every moment, *Mason, this man,* he motions, *wants to see the pigs and ask some questions.*

Randall nods, *yeah, sure, ask away.*

“How do you breed them?” Mason asks before Will finished translating, “what do you feed them?” His voice drops into an almost teasing conspiratorial tone, “do they eat meat?”

They breed however they want, Randall replies, *they eat whatever they want. Mostly scraps of food, but anything they find they can have unless it will hurt them.*

“Have they ever eaten a live animal?” Mason asks, almost too enthused about the prospect, “have they ever eaten a human?”

“What the hell are you researching?” Jimmy finally mutters under his breath, looking wide-eyed.

“A new breed of pigs,” Mason shoots back, waiting impatiently for Will to translate.

Randall is similarly cautious when Will asks, *if they can catch something they’ll eat it, and no, before your friend asks, they haven’t caught a human.* He crosses his arms defensively, and grins like a wolf, *I have though.*

Will stops translating at that, processing the information and deciding that the team doesn’t have to know it. *So you’ve done the ritual?* Will asks gently.

Not traditionally, Randall says, *but yes. I caught my pig, dragged them to the table and ripped their heart out with my hands, my claws,* he flexes his fingers as if feeling the claws under his skin, *I’m not a human. I asked Hannibal once if I was ever a human, if I’ve ever been reborn as one. I’ve only ever worn human skin, he told me, but I’ve never felt like I was one.* He gives Will a little smile, *it’s nice to have you, though it would be better to have met your friend.*

Will can imagine it almost as clearly as if it were happening, Peter and Randall meeting each other. They would have loved it, been fast friends. It’s almost painful to think of.

“We can take some home, right,” Mason asks the air, going to pick up a piglet that’s running from him, “a male and a female, maybe I could breed them with my other fighters. Get a more potent mix.”

“I don’t think we’ll be allowed to take the pigs,” Jack warns, though it lacks his usual order-like bite.

Mason simply shrugs, “perhaps,” he allows, not looking too worried about it. Will doesn’t really like the sudden casual tone after his fairly excited questions.

They spend a few more hours together at the farm, Mason attempting to catch pigs and inspecting them when he does. They have a look around the stalls, and Will sits with Randall next to a new mother while Mason takes photos on his phone and avoids dipping his shoes into any muck lying around. The group of scientists join them after it’s clear Mason has

settled in for his own lacklustre research, at least until he calls them over to ask them about the stall.

They break for lunch, Mason finally deciding they can go and eat. Jack manages to distract Mason enough for Will to thank the stallholder for the meal, and for the science team to offer some buttons they had wanted in exchange.

“We need coins,” Bev sighs as they sit down to eat, “I’ll run out of fancy buttons.”

“I think they’re just pitying you,” Jimmy replies, “I don’t think they actually want the buttons.”

“That’s worse!” Bev moans, dramatically placing her hand on her head, “my poor buttons!”

Cordell watches them all with a sharp gaze, and Will can’t help but feel as though he’s studying them. He can feel Cordell’s gaze on his back, and he worries about what he’s watching for, his guilt?

Mason eats with them, picking apart the bread dish and taking out the bits he doesn’t like. The dish lays destroyed in his lap, and most of it ends up on the ground without being tried. Randall watches as he does so, and Will can feel the growl rising, waiting to be ripped free.

Thankfully Winston, darling of Will’s life, comes by to say hi, distracting them all and taking Mason’s mess. Will ruffles his hair, and he catches a glimpse of Randall watching them with open jealousy.

You’re good with dogs, Randall says out of the blue, *same with most animals, right?*

I like strays, yeah, Will agrees, *animals are easier than people, they don’t judge.*

They don’t, Randall nods along, scratching a hand through Winston’s fur and baring his teeth, *I’m glad you like us. It’s good, you’ll balance it out. Hannibal’s people, and you're the less refined folk.*

I would ask if you’re insulting me, but, Will grins back, feeling a camaraderie he hasn’t felt in a while, *less refined, huh? That’s about right.*

Randall goes back to the farm, leaving the conversation easily, no thought for simple human things like manners. Will doesn’t really care, he finishes his lunch and continues to pet Winston. Cordell still watches him like a hawk, and there’s a small crease of judgement there, a disapproval of his private conversation.

It’s late when Mason decides to call it a day, wandering away to his room, probably ready to plan for pig-theft. Will trudges up to Hannibal’s house, his feet sore and exhaustion weighing heavy on him.

Will, Hannibal says when he sees him, drawing him into a hug and letting him melt.

Missed you, Will mutters back, hiding his face, not realising how drained he felt emotionally, too much time around people too busy for him.

I hope you'll forgive my wish to leave Mason, even though it left you alone with him, Hannibal sighs softly, separately them gently to sit Will down on a chair, *I can understand why you didn't wish for his return,*

He's awful, Will lets himself whine, *he's just a dick, he's so-* Will breaks off with a groan. Hannibal places a plate in front of him, a dinner of meat wrapped in pastry, leaking juices from the middle.

Well, tell me about your day, Hannibal offers, almost like a housewife when their husband returns. Will almost laughs at the mental image, barely holding it when he thinks of Hannibal in an apron.

I met Randall, Will offers, *he said he didn't feel human. He was honestly one of the easiest to talk to.*

He's peculiar, Hannibal allows, taking an elegant bite, *very interesting though. His ritual was very entertaining, he chased down an animal abuser.*

He told me about it, Will says, *and, um, my team figured out we are…together, uh, dating?*

I don't care who knows we're together, Will, Hannibal assures, *if you would allow it I'd dress you up and parade you around town on horseback, decorated in the finest things I own.*

Suffice to say they end up tangled in bed together that night, trading soft kisses, gentle whispers, and the heat of their bodies in the dark. Will feels himself shed tears, Hannibal wiping them away, weaving words of adoration against Will until he almost believes them.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, yes, Hannibal is soft. I don't make the rules (I do). I'm not sorry about including Randall, I always felt like he and Will could've been friends if Hannibal hadn't...you know.... Also I hope you hate Mason as much as I do writing him (oh I hope no one likes him how I wrote him).

Anyway, thank you for your engagement in any way! We're getting to the pointy end and I really enjoy reading all your predictions. I hope you enjoyed, and have a great day!

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Some translations and some love

Chapter Notes

Quick TW again for Mason, he insinuates that Will should be intimate with Hannibal to help persuade him in making a decision. Also mentions of death again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack has the worst timing, Will swears. He's enjoying breakfast with Hannibal, having slipped on one of his shirts as his lazy morning brain started to wake up. His dreams left him absent-minded, the softness of his sleep leaving his mind stunningly clear, except for the gentle feeling of Hannibal holding him. Thankfully they are both dressed, just halfway through eating breakfast that Hannibal had coached Will through making. It's essentially toast, but they had made fresh jam out of blood-red berries.

"Will!" Jack calls through the door, "we need you down in our rooms." He knocks rapidly once more and Will sighs, rubbing away the beginnings of a headache. Hannibal glares at the door as if he could make Jack leave them along through simple will power, and it almost seems to work as the knocks stop. Will can imagine him on the other side though, tapping his foot rapidly on the floor in the same pattern he was using on the door.

"I'm coming," Will calls back, rolling his head to crack his neck and finally get up from his seat. "I'm coming." He pulls the door open, only to come face to face with Jack's scowl.

"We need you to do some translations on the stuff the team has gathered," Jack explains, before realising Hannibal is in the room and nodding to him. "Morning," he says, brushing up against social niceties, "c'mon Will."

"Yeah, sure," Will sighs, before turning to the chief, *they need me to translate some stuff, I probably won't be back for a little while.*

If you're back for lunch we can get something at the stalls, Hannibal offers, walking forward to nudge his forehead against Will's, something just on the edge of romantic.

Jack looks at him oddly as they leave, but he either doesn't care enough or is worried about the consequences of opening that particular can of worms.

When they get to the rooms, Will can see the spread of things all over every available surface. Any blank space is filled with pictures or notes, and Bev, Brian and Jimmy are practically a whirlwind in the middle of it all. He gets shepherded to one corner of the room, no one except Mason really noticing he's arrived yet, unfortunately.

"Oh, hi," Mason drawls, watching the room with obvious boredom, "you know, when I sent out an expedition to unchartered lands I thought they'd discover something more interesting than pottery." He sighs, turning to shift his attention to Will, "I thought we'd have some gold, perhaps a little bit of silk, maybe even a previously unknown animal species."

"There are species of undiscovered plants here," Will offers, crossing his arms almost defensively.

"Plants!" Mason moans, "who's interested in plants? No, no, no, give me something darker, grittier. Not plants."

Cordell hums, "I thought the middle platform was interesting, it's obvious they use it for some sort of ritual." Will's surprise to hear him speak, his voice is low, something sinister curling around it in a way that has Will shivering despite himself.

"It's their becoming," Will mutters, "when they get the cloak."

"Yeah," Bev calls over, finally looking up from her piece of clothing, "the cloak is a representation of their maturing, it's built up for weeks, it's incredibly detailed. I mean, the workmanship on those things." She pauses her gushing and her eyes seem to focus, "Oh, hi, Will."

"Will's here?" Jimmy asks, looking up as well and finally noticing him, "Oh, thank goodness, help me figure out what these mean."

"No, no," Mason argues, "I think I'll steal Will away for the morning, have him show me where this whole ritual takes place."

"I specifically asked after him though," Jimmy sighs, knowing he's fighting a losing battle, "it'll only take us a minute or so."

"Then you can do it when we get back," Mason grins, already standing, "besides, I paid for this whole thing, I'm the reason you're here in the first place." With that, he drags Will and Cordell out into the street and then continues on his way to the centre platform.

They stand, looking up at the pyramid, the almost gone streaks of blood running down the sides, the intricate carvings done into the material. It looks formidable in front of them, looming over the surrounding landscape.

"Run me through the ritual," Mason requests, stepping forward to knock against the stone like it's a door, a clear sign he doesn't particularly care about it.

"It's a maturing, of sorts, someone studies for years, honing a craft, and when Hannibal deems them worthy they can have their becoming, be an Ulima, that's their word for it." Will

carefully steps around them, keeping his eyes locked on the patterns in the stone.

“Yes, sure, but what do they do to mature?” Mason asks, following his gaze.

“They kill someone,” Will offers, deadpan, “in a ritualistic way.”

Mason stops, and then a slow grin spreads across his features, “ritualistic slaughter,” he breathes, “yes! Yes! This is what I was talking about! Something new and exciting and, and, savage! Oh, Cordell, isn’t this fantastic!”

“It’s certainly something,” Cordell says, watching the pyramid with open longing, “certainly something.” He reaches out to lay a hand flat on the stone’s surface.

“You have to be chosen, right?” Mason asks, “and the chief does that?”

“Yeah, you have to study for a while, hone a craft,” Will offers, feeling detached from the energy Mason seems to have been given.

“I’ll buy a craft, or whatever, listen I just want in on the ritual,” Mason grins, “I don’t care what you have to do to get it, if you catch my drift,” he gives a heavy wink, and Will’s face flushes with the implication. “That’s also where you get the robes, yeah? I could have a fun new experience, and a little token to take home with me. Good enough to sell when I get bored of it.”

“It’s not that simple,” Will tells him, becoming insulted on behalf of everyone in the town, “they only use criminals, the lowest of the low, and the robe takes time to complete, and you haven’t done any of the studies.”

“I’m sure there are some criminals running around, Cordell could probably use his skill and I’ll pass it off as mine, and I don’t need a full robe,” Mason explains, shrugging away his concerns, “Besides, you can convince Hannibal to bend the rules.”

“I’m a surgeon,” Cordell explains, “I’m sure that would be craft enough.”

“Listen, Will,” Mason says, walking right up to him, “tonight you’ll bring it up with Hannibal, and if he says no we’ll deal with it, but I doubt he’ll say no, right?”

“I’ll bring it up with Ak Hannibal,” Will stresses the term of respect, even though he barely uses it himself, “but he’s the chief, there’s nothing I can do if he refuses.”

“Oh, I sincerely doubt that,” Mason grins, “well then, come along, I’m sure your team is waiting for you.”

Will follows, feeling boxed in with Mason leading and Cordell behind, making their way through the stalls back to the rooms. The people around them watch as they pass, avoiding their group as if they can feel Mason’s disgusting energy. A few give Will nervous glances or sympathetic smiles, feeling for him. He doesn’t meet them, but he knows that they have similar thoughts to his own.

When they get back the room isn't any tidier, in fact, it seems more notes have joined the piles, and a few stray jackets have knocked some things to the ground. Jimmy looks up as soon as they enter, and grabs a corner of Will's sleeve to drag him to his corner of the room.

"You're back," Bev says, smiling at him over a magnifying glass, "Jimmy was looking up every time the door moved at all."

"Didn't want to miss you again," Jimmy explains, "I've just been waiting for you to get back."

"What did you need me for?" Will asks, and Jimmy grabs a handful of photos and drops them in front of Will. They're printed in black and white, as the portable printer they brought is limited. The proper versions will be printed when they get back home.

"What do these say? The other graves don't have the extra lines of writing, and I imagine they all say very similar things," Jimmy explains, pointing at the two graves present.

Will takes a look at the photos, seeing a zoomed-in version of the two separated mausoleums, the writing finally clear enough for him to read. This zoomed-in Will can see etchings in the side of the doors, symbols that don't mean anything, that are there simply for decoration, things both light and dark. There are flowers interspersed with bones, swirls give way to teeth. It's eerie in its comforting, a reminder of both the good and the bad. The life lived, and the death given.

"Hannibal didn't want us near these," Will reminds Jimmy, looking at him, "should we be reading them?"

"I don't want to do anything with the translations," Jimmy reassures quickly, "I just want to know what sets them apart!"

Trusting Jimmy enough to not misuse any information given, Will casts his eyes over the first inscription, reading through it once before translating. "It says, 'Mischa Lecter, dearly beloved sister, gone but not forgotten'."

"The chief had a sister?" Jimmy says, cocking his head to the side, "no, wait I can see it." He scribbles a note down, "is the other one very similar?"

Will reads it too, and stops in his tracks, swallowing heavily against a ball of nervousness. "I don't want to read this one aloud," he admits to Jimmy, "I don't think I should."

"Oh," Jimmy says, shrugging, "that's okay, can you tell me if it's also for Hannibal's family member?"

"His lover, yes," Will sighs, and Jimmy frowns sympathetically.

"Oh, yeah, I can understand your hesitance," he says, "would sting me too, I guess. That's really all I needed anyway." Will nods at him, feeling scooped out.

"I'm going to get some lunch," Will says, trying not to let his voice betray his feelings. He hurries out, and no one stops him. He can feel Cordell watching him though, sharp eyes

digging into his back, his borrowed shirt. He feels flayed, uncomfortably studied.

Will trudges through the street, forgoing grabbing lunch to see Hannibal. He steps right up to the door, and knocks, feeling too separated from himself to go in as he had been doing easily before.

Will, Hannibal greets as soon as the door opens, picking up on Will's distress as if it were his own, *please, come inside.*

Will steps in, but doesn't sit anywhere, he hovers in the entryway, just inside the door but not going anywhere near the living area. Hannibal stops with him, watching Will cautiously.

Hannibal, Will says, moving to hug himself, *I need you to be completely honest with me, okay?*

Will, I will always be true with you, Hannibal assures him, *what has you so concerned?*

I translated some of the graves in your burial area, and I found something, Will says, sighing nervously, *I saw your sister's grave, and then I saw…*

You saw your own, Hannibal murmurs, understanding.

'Will Graham', Will quotes, *'lover and dear Mosurre, may we meet again'.* He takes a step back, just to give some distance between them, both physically and emotionally, *Hannibal, are you only with me because I'm reborn and you're meant to be? Do you want this relationship, or is this some sort of obligation? Do you even like me?* Embarrassingly the ball of nerves tightens, and Will can sense the beginnings of a sob building in his throat.

Will, you are eternally beautiful to me, Hannibal murmurs, taking a step closer, *yes, you have been reborn again and again, but each time I see you I fall for you, even before knowing who you truly are.* He takes another step, so he can lean closer, *you are so fascinating, your mind is an enigma I wish I could live in, you are everything to me.* He draws Will into a hug gently, letting him pull away if he needs to, but Will goes easily. *Loving you is not an obligation, I never suffer when I'm with you.*

Oh, Will breathes, clinging to Hannibal, *if it makes you feel any better, loving you isn't an obligation either.*

I'm glad, Hannibal says into his hair, and Will shivers against him.

Wait, Will protests, pulling away reluctantly, *wait, I need to ask you another important thing.*

Anything, Hannibal assures, *what's bothering you?*

*That word, Mosurre, you keep calling me that, and other people have called me that, and I just want to know what it means." Will glances up at him, and sees Hannibal thinking things through, *I just want the truth,* Will reminds him, waiting for the cogs to stop turning.

It is a difficult word, I don't want to cause confusion, Hannibal says, *it's a term of endearment, when I use it for you, like beloved, or dear. Because you are my beloved, my Mosurre. It means more, though. It is a more eternal love, crossing the boundaries of death.*

And when others use it? Will asks, tilting his head to allow Hannibal the chance to kiss his cheek.

It's used for respect, Hannibal tells him, *because we are together, like Aknorra but by my side. A complimentary force to my own, equal and opposite. People may use it instead of your name, you are already dear to the community here, they respect you but have been waiting for you to settle in.*

So it's not something terribly out there, Will says, nodding, *it's very…you. I'm not used to being something shown off, I guess.*

You should be, Hannibal tell him, *anyone who has you should want to show off.*

I think it's very much the other way around in this relationship, Will hums, *I feel like I should be the one celebrating my catch.*

We'll parade each other around, Hannibal allows, *though I must insist that you take the more extravagant horse.*

Will laughs a little wetly, letting Hannibal draw him in again for more reassurance. Hannibal hooks his head on Will's shoulder, holding him close.

Come inside, I've prepared some lunch, Hannibal offers, *you can teach me how to say what it is.*

Will follows Hannibal to the living area, where they have lunch together. Will teaches Hannibal how to say 'vegetable soup' and laughs at the look on Hannibal's face when he simplifies every piece down to two words or less. They don't go out that afternoon, lazing the day away with books, art, comfortable silences in a quiet room. Will spends time making some fishing lures, watching Hannibal sketch out of the corner of his eye. He eventually gets the courage to sneak past Hannibal and catch a glimpse of his art, and spots dark curls around expressive eyes and turns away with a blush.

You're truly beautiful, dear Will, Hannibal says, spotting Will's embarrassment.

Sure, Will laughs, waving him off, *I thought my mind was the main draw?*

Not a part of you is without delight, Hannibal murmurs, turning back to shade in his cheeks. Will flushes with that and has to escape to grab a drink of water.

Dinner is a mix of Hannibal and Will, salmon and potatoes roasted carefully with seasoning that Will can't quite understand. Will finds himself moving easily around the space, fitting in the natural gaps Hannibal makes, slotting together like a puzzle. They sit and eat together, sipping wine from goblets.

Is that all they needed you for this morning, Hannibal asks gently, *translating the graves? *

Yeah, Will replies easily, feeling a lot less choked up about that than he was before, *and Mason dragged me away to ask about the ritual. He wants to become an Ulima.*

He does? Hannibal asks, cocking an eyebrow.

He seemed very excited about it, asked me to ask you to bend the rules, Will explains, mirroring Hannibal's confused mirth, *he actually suggested I use our relationship to persuade you to.*

What a rude little man, Hannibal scoffs, *why did he seem so intrigued?*

He wanted something fun to do, he said, like a tourist attraction, Will scoffs, *he doesn't care about anything here, not the culture, not the rituals, he only wants to take.*

He won't get the chance, Hannibal promises, taking a delicate bite of salmon.

They do the dishes together, getting everything packed up nicely. That night they get wrapped up in each other, not taking it too far but lying together in simple contentment. Will finds himself more at home than he's ever felt. Will falls asleep wrapped in Hannibal's arms, gentle pressure around him to remind him how safe and loved he is.

He dreams of Hannibal, both of them together. Blood runs below them, a gentle stream. A figure rises from it, and as the blood peels from it, so does their skin. Will is left staring at a flayed Mason, a maniacal grin spreading across his face, his teeth eerily on display. He wakes abruptly as the antlers of a deer burst through his chest.

Will huddles in closer to Hannibal, breath coming out in sharp puffs. Hannibal is already awake to soothe him through it, running a hand across his back.

He won't get the chance, Hannibal repeats, full of dark promise, and Will lets himself fall back asleep to the soft assurances.

Chapter End Notes

Hi again, welcome to this chapter were so many things happen and yet nothing happens. Sorry it's shorter, hopefully the reveals make up for it. There will probably only be two or three more chapters and then an epilogue, the finish line is in sight! Thank you for reading, and all your lovely engagement, and I hope you have a great day.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Some soft times, with a decision looming over it all.

Chapter Notes

Mason is being awful again, as usual. He describes the people of the village in unsavory terms, just brace yourself if you need to!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes slowly, blinking against the soft sunlight streaming through the window. He mumbles in annoyance, his dreams disappearing like smoke, and turns his head further into the soft pillow underneath him. There's a rumbling laugh, quiet and warm, and Will weakly swats at the source.

Good morning, Mosurre Hannibal murmurs, easily avoiding Will's swats.

Will blinks an eye open and squints, *I haven't seen you with bed hair before,* he says, *for some reason I thought you woke up all perfect.*

I doubt perfection exists in anyone but you, Hannibal tells him, grinning when Will buries his face again.

Bev was right, you've been flirting with me since day one, haven't you? Will groans, relishing in the way Hannibal casually touches him, in the way he accepts it easily.

I was certainly trying to, Hannibal says, pressing a kiss to his nape, *I'm guessing you did not pick it up?*

Will simple groans again, this time turning towards Hannibal, *what use is empathy if I can't figure out when I'm being hit on?* He presses a gentle kiss on Hannibal's lips, grinning into it when it turns deeper. He separates with a soft sigh. *Not that I'm not grateful to see you, but you're usually up by now, what's going on?*

Nothing, darling, Hannibal tells him, settling onto his elbow, *my preference is to stay with you until you wake, unfortunately, we've been quite busy the last few mornings.*

Making up for lost time, Will mutters in understanding, letting his eyes slip closed again.

I always am, with you, Hannibal murmurs, *I find the time we have together always so fleeting, so short.*

I'm not opposed to staying like this forever, Will whispers back, loose with sleep, *it's glorious.*

Hannibal hums, *who'll give Mason the bad news?*

Will stiffens, opening his eyes in annoyance as his good feelings are suddenly ripped away. It's not only the thought of Mason, but also the thought of his inevitable leaving. He has a whole life he left behind him, and he's sure it's not anxious for his return, but he can't just leave forever, can he?

I've hit a sore spot, Hannibal says softly, as if trying to preserve the atmosphere as it slips through his fingers, *I apologise. You don't have to make a choice about your stay here yet, your party certainly doesn't seem in a rush.*

I don't want to leave, Will admits, *this space, you, but I have a whole life. I left expecting to return. I can't ignore that.*

You don't have to, Hannibal reassures, *I don't expect you to. You choose what is best for you. If you must break my heart and leave, I can't stop you.* He presses a soft kiss to his forehead, *of course I would ask you to stay, but your happiness is my utmost desire.*

You're certainly achieving it, Will tells him, *and thank you, for giving me time. What do you say to spending more of it just like this?*

It's a splendid idea, Hannibal mumbles, settling back down.

They don't get up for another while, eating something closer to lunch than breakfast. Will sits next to Hannibal once the plates are away and reads one of his books aloud, a story about Greek myths that he read when he was younger. Hannibal takes interest in the way the English words are formed and sounds particularly disappointed that names like Apollo and Hades are not common.

So is this what you believe? Hannibal asks, *these Gods?*

I'm not quite a believer, of anything really, Will says, shrugging, *I've always felt a little too left alone for that.* He gently closes the book, setting it on the table, *what about you? I remember, that first book you loaned me, mentioned something about the Aknorra and the Gods. I couldn't figure it out.*

The Aknorra is a God, Hannibal explains, *the rebirth cycle is dictated by them, the world created by them, they are in control. There are a few exceptions, of course, things and people always outside their cycles.*

But you're the Aknorra, Will says, *so you're a God?*

Yes, Hannibal says, a smile on his face that speaks to playfulness, *and you are forever outside of my control.*

Will lets out a bark of a laugh, *I'm sure I'm not that unpredictable.*

If you were predictable, I wouldn't love you so, Hannibal tells him, watching as Will stands and pads across the room to put the book back with his own things.

Will's response is drowned by rapid knocks on the door and Will sighs. *If it's Jack, I'll murder him,* he grumbles, missing the sharp smirk that crosses Hannibal's face.

When he pulls the door open Abigail is waiting for him on the other side, looking behind her nervously. She turns to face him as the door open, and shock dances across her features before it turns into sly playfully.

Good morning, Will, she says, *what a surprise to see you here.*

Yeah, Will replies as dryly as possible, *shut up.*

I didn't say anything, Abigail protests, shrugging with a grin.

You're thinking it, Will shoots back, *what did you need anyway?*

Your friend, Mason, he's run through the streets, taking things off stalls, Abigail looks briefly over her shoulder, *no one has done anything, we don't really want to cause any extra tension.*

Will and I will smooth everything over, Hannibal offers, sliding up next to Will. Abigail stiffens slightly, losing the playfulness and replacing it with respect.

Thank you, Ak Hannibal, she says, smiling at him, *I'll go and let them know.* She nods her head in a slight bow and dashes off back down the stairs.

She's much more respectful of you, Will remarks, going to grab his shoes and tug them on.

She is much more comfortable with you, though, Hannibal returns, slipping on his own, *I had hoped she would ease with me after her ritual, now that we are on more equal standing, but I fear she still views me as Aknorra first.*

Friend and carer second, Will murmurs in agreement, *I'm not the psychologist here, but I think spending time with her might help, she just looks up to you.*

We can have lunch together one day, Hannibal considers, *but for now let's get to Mason.*

Together they step down onto the street, and a few stallholders flock to them. They point out their stalls and the things taken, explaining to Hannibal in hushed and respectful tones. Will notices them all carefully step around him in the conversation, allowing him to say whatever he wants whenever he wants to, but also to let Hannibal take over the more technical details. They smile and wave at him as they approach, already accepting of his presence.

A crash sounds not too far away and they both turn towards the sounds of raised voices. Will starts first, Hannibal right on his heels as they make their way through the crowds. There's

chaos in front of them, a stall tipped on its side and an angry stall holder cursing at a rather guilt-free Mason.

You go running around, the man is fuming, *you take everyone's wares, and when you don't get your way you throw a fit like a child!*

"Oh, shut up," Mason groans, "you can fix your little stall, it's nothing." He spots Will as he hurries over and makes a grand motion towards the tipped stall, "Will, tell him to shut up, I can't take his shrieking anymore!"

"What did you do?" Will asks as Hannibal goes to smooth things over with the stallholder and takes his complaints.

"I just wanted to grab the painting, didn't realise it was stuck on," Mason defends himself, "they're making a big deal out of nothing. Just fix it up."

"You can't just take things," Will sighs, "you need to pay for them, or trade for them, or something."

"Don't bother," Bev cuts in, "we've been telling him that all morning."

"There's no point in actually contributing to whatever constitutes as an economy here," Mason argues, "we'll be gone before they even figure out what an economy is."

Will, Hannibal calls, taking his attention, *this stallholder asks that Mason helps him right his stall, otherwise he will be pressing charges.*

And pressing charges means? Will questions gently.

Either paying back the damages in full, plus the earnings they would have made, Hannibal explains, *or going into community service until the debt is repaid.*

"Mason, you have to help him put the stall back or he'll sue you," Will explains, watching Mason scoff, "and you don't have a legal representative here."

"Fine, fine! Cordell," Mason calls, "go help them fix their stall or whatever."

Cordell goes to do so, and Will catches the sharp look the stallholder sends their way as he watches, obviously displeased that Mason isn't the one actually helping. Cordell helps the stallholder and another onlooker right the stall, and as he does so Will can see the faint outline of a gun against his hip.

He feels itchy at its presence, worrying about the constant display of an expected force, like Cordell is just waiting for a chance to kill someone on the street. It's nothing at all like the ritual, he ponders, the beauty they show in the death, in the preservation and growth of themself. There's nothing righteous about shooting someone on the street. There's no art to it.

As the stall gets righted, Mason turns to Will. "How's it going on the whole ritual front, should I go meet someone for a robe fitting?"

“I talked to Hannibal, and we agreed you can’t do the ritual,” Will tells him.

“You’re joking,” Mason deadpans, waving his hand towards him, “just tell me what I need to do before it happens and you guys can organise the rest.”

“It’s not happening,” Will tries, “you’re not doing the ritual.”

“Yes, it is,” Mason shoots back, “I know you can change some key minds, I don’t care how you do it. I just want it done.”

“I don’t want you to do the ritual,” Will argues, “it’s incredibly sacred, it’s art. Not something you can just do for the hell of it. And the robe is something incredibly important to these people, no one’s going to make it for you if you don’t do the ritual, so don’t even ask.”

Mason turns narrowed eyes on him, going still, “you’re not going to let me do the ritual,” he says, slowly, “need I remind you who paid for your visit here, who is the only thing allowing you to get back?” When Will doesn’t reply, a sharp smirk crosses Mason’s face, “well I guess you’d be fine staying back here with these savages anyway.”

“Mason,” Jack warns, finally sensing the tense air hanging between Will and Mason. Will can feel Hannibal step up behind him, a solid supporting weight, even as he stays silent to let Will speak.

“You’re right,” Mason shrugs, suddenly turning lighter, “they’re not going to make a robe for me.” He looks around at the onlookers, drawn first by the crash and now by the argument. They stand around, murmuring lowly if speaking at all, judging eyes landing heavily on Mason’s back. “We’ll leave tomorrow,” he declares to the crowd, before turning to Will, “feel free to join us.”

He stalks off, Cordell following him. Will watches them go, his shoulders still tense and his teeth grinding. Bev takes a step toward him cautiously, probably knowing he’s close to snapping.

“Are you thinking of staying here?” She asks softly, sadly.

“Maybe,” Will sighs, “I don’t know yet, I was hoping-“ he breaks off, not able to say it now that it’s been ripped from him.

“It’s okay,” Bev assures him, “think it over, we’ll try and delay it as much as we can if you need.”

“No, it’s okay,” Will waves her off, the crowd around him dissipates, “don’t stay on my account. I’ll figure it out soon enough.”

“We better go make sure Mason doesn’t destroy something in our rooms,” Bev offers, “take all the time you need.” She nods at him once, before turning to follow Mason back to their rooms. Jack is already halfway there, and Brian and Jimmy give Will a sympathetic look before following. Will lets out a breath as they leave, and finds himself thankful that the crowd around him has scattered almost completely.

He turns to the stallholder, who's still setting their paintings back together properly. *I apologise for my team member, he doesn't understand the culture here.*

He doesn't understand manners, the stallholder shoots back angrily, before softening, *though it seems that translates over to you as well. I'm sorry he yelled at you.*

Oh, no that wasn't because of this, Will motions to the stall, *it was something else.*

Doesn't matter, he's vile, the man says, matter of fact.

I would have to agree, Hannibal says, slotting neatly into the conversation, *he's terribly rude.*

Ak Hannibal, the stallholder acknowledges, *Mosurre. Thank you for helping me settle it.*

Before Will can assure him it's not a problem Hannibal says; *if he returns, let us know,* before sweeping them both away. He leads Will away to a quieter corner of the markets, gently setting him down on a spare seat, and that's when Will realises he's shaking. Hannibal goes to get him some food and gently hands it over. Thankfully it's something sturdy, something he won't be able to spill. Hannibal sits with him, and they eat together, and when Will finishes he feels a lot more stable.

Why was Mason so upset, aside from being immature, Hannibal asks gently.

He wanted to do the ritual, I told him he wasn't allowed to, Will admits, *he blew up. Didn't like the fact that he's not allowed to do something.* He swallows nervously, *he said they're leaving tomorrow.*

Oh, Hannibal says, deflating ever so slightly, *and you are…?*

I don't know if I'm staying, or leaving, Will assures, *I don't know what I want yet.*

You want more time, Hannibal offers, and Will laughs.

I want more time, but I'm not going to get it. He shrugs, letting his hands lie in his lap, *can we just ignore it for the rest of the day? Pretend we have more time?*

Hannibal sends a sad smile his way, tinged with the need to say more, but he holds back. *Just for the rest of the day.*

They retire back to Hannibal's house, hidden away from the rest of the world. Will spends as much time as possible being as close to Hannibal as he can, laying his head on his shoulder as he reads aloud, letting Hannibal take over when his voice fails him. He feels both proud and saddened when he finds Hannibal's English so much better than before, and it doesn't take long for him to ask to do something else.

They're halfway through Hannibal teaching Will a traditional song on their odd little piano when there's a knock against the door. Will goes to answer it, feeling numb, his feet don't feel the floor.

Hi, Will, Abigail says, standing on the other side of the door, *um, I wanted to give you this,* she holds out a hand, and in it sits a small bead, smaller than anything Will has ever owned. It's incredibly detailed though, swirls of fur giving way to two small dark eyes, the curl of a tail giving it a more spherical structure, and the nose tucked gently into its belly. Will takes it reverently. *It's a thank you,* Abigail explains, *and a sorry that Mason yelled at you, but I made it before that.* She smiles a little sadly, *and maybe a goodbye?*

How do you-?

I saw your team doing some packing, moving things about in their rooms, she shrugs, though it's clear she's feeling anything but nonchalant, *We all knew you might be leaving eventually, but everyone's a little sad to see you all go,* she thinks for a second and amends, *well, most of you.*

Will swallows. *Well, thank you,* he says, he would tell her he's still considering staying, but he doesn't want to give her too much hope. *Why don't you come inside for some food,* he offers, *I'm sure we've got something around here.*

Abigail hesitates for just a second, before smiling. *Sure.*

They do, in fact, have something. Hannibal spreads some cookies around a plate and makes tea for them all. They talk about everything and anything, though purposefully staying away from Will's life before. Before what Will isn't sure, this last fortnight has had too many life-defining moments for him.

When Abigail leaves, Will feels less hollow, less like he'll fall apart at any moment. He spends another hour or so working on a new lure, pulling together bits and pieces that compliment the bead, and he slips it gently into place. He's not aware he's crying until there's a gentle hand on his cheek, wiping his tears away.

You're exhausted, Hannibal tells him gently, *mentally, emotionally, come on.* They retire to bed early, and Will gets wrapped in blankets and furs, soft things tucked around him until he feels comfortable himself. Hannibal tucks behind him, soft and supportive.

Will stays awake as long as he can, even as the sun sets and darkness curls around every corner in the room. He stays awake even as Hannibal's breaths even, and his own eyelids grow heavy. He stays awake until the shadows play tricks on his mind, and the moon itself looks like a threat. But he doesn't want to fall asleep, doesn't want tomorrow to come.

The deer bows its head towards him, antlers scraping his forehead in a reminder that tomorrow will come no matter what, and Will finally succumbs to the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Me for all of last week: wow, am I forgetting something?

I'm so sorry I skipped last week, this was complete, just not the chapter after it. Now I have both ready and done, so next week is a definite, even if the week after is a little iffy. I know this was a little shorter than usual, hopefully not too much. Also! Thank you so much for everyone who engages with my writing in any way, shape or form, only a few more chapters left. As always, I hope you enjoyed, and have an amazing day!

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Someone leaves, someone stays, and something has drastically changed.

Chapter Notes

As usual (oh, no, this is usual now), Mason sucks. There is also mention of death, and blood.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's walking through the village, there's blood on every wall. His eyes flit across the horizon, where a dark sun hangs above him, its rays striking the ground with a harshness Will knows is unnatural.

He's drenched in sweat, or lake water, or blood. He can't tell, the liquid shimmers in the light, changing colour and viscosity every time he blinks. It sticks to his hands, travels up his arms to curl around his shoulders. It's there on the soles of his boots, slithering through to his skin underneath.

He turns a corner and sees the stag in front of him, standing at the edge of the trees, holding its ground. It meets Will's gaze head-on, and so Will approaches. As he gets close he can see a gaping wound in the animal's side, and almost as if Will's eyes have woken it, it begins to bleed. Blood rushes forth, life giving and life taking in equal measure, and Will can't tear his gaze away. As he steps closer the wound widens, until the beast tips its head towards the sky and bellows.

Will wakes with a scream lodged in his throat, a call he knows will sound hauntingly familiar if he lets it out. Hannibal is there before Will even wakes, a hand on his arm and warm words floating through the air until Will can make out what they mean.

A nightmare, Mosurre? Hannibal asks. Will nods against him, still feeling shaken, *would you like to share it?*

Not really, Will mumbles, *I was at least hoping for a good start to the day, I guess that's been taken from me too.*

You still have a choice, Hannibal murmurs to him, his hand continuously stroking up and down Will's arm. Will shakes, a full-body shiver, and huffs a breath.

We'll see, Will mutters, *come on, we should get up.*

They dance around breakfast, Hannibal gently coaching Will through some sort of oatmeal, with a flourish of honey and berries to top it off. It settles heavily in Will's stomach, what should be fulfilling and warm sitting like a rock. Will wants to hide, stay in the room until the choice is made for him, and after the bowls are washed and put away he curls up in a chair and wishes he could simply close his eyes and vanish.

Hannibal lets him, settling down next to him and reading aloud, the silence being forcibly shoved backwards until all that sits in the space is Hannibal's warm words.

It shatters, though, when the door flings open hard enough for it to bang against the wall, and Will jumps, startled. Randall stands, heaving in breaths as if he had run the whole way, and his face is thunderous. He settles when Hannibal glares at him, his disappointment turning Randall's face into soft guilt.

Sorry, he apologises, grabbing the door before it can come back and hit him, *Ak Hannibal, Will.* He winces slightly when Hannibal doesn't soften at the apology, *Mosurre, sorry.*

It's okay, Will assures, *what's going on?*

Mason took Daisy, Randall snarls, and for a second Will imagines Mason taking a person before his mind brings up the pigs, *and Herb, stole them both right out of the paddock. He's got leashes on them, they're screaming.* His hands curl, as if imagining Mason's head and tearing right through it, *make him stop.*

Will's already dragging on his shoes, tying up the laces as quickly as he can. *Where is he?*

Near the centre of town, he was going to take them through the forest but we cornered him, Randall rushes, grabbing Will's hand when he stands up and then releasing it with a snarl. *Come on,* he urges.

He leads them down the stairs and then through the streets until they stumble across a wall of people, a circle that is holding something in the middle. Will can hear what Randall had meant by screaming, two cries of pig screeching sound through the air, and it sounds hauntingly human. There are too many people shouting for Will to make out any particular words or phrases, but the sentiment is obvious.

As they approach the crowd turns its attention towards them, allowing them to pass even as they angrily explain to Hannibal what has happened. The crowd splits as they turn, letting Will have a clear line of sight to where Mason is attempting to wrangle two piglets. Beverly, Brian and Jimmy are standing at a distance, almost merged into the crowd, as they yell at him. Jack is a lot closer, hands out as he argues with Mason, but making no attempts to actually grab the leashes, which Will sees now are closer to poles with loops of wire. Cordell is nowhere to be seen.

Hannibal says something over the crowd but Will is moving forward, coming up beside Mason and physically grabbing the end of the poles. The pigs scream as Mason jerks at the

new pressure, but Will doesn't relent.

"Let go," he orders, the words coming out darker than he expected. Mason glares at him, gripping harder on the poles.

"No," he enunciates, "back off, I'm taking them." He jerks his hand as if to rip the poles out of Will's hands, but he holds on.

"Mason, leave the pigs," Will orders, not pulling even though he wants to, "you're riling everyone up."

"Then settle them down," Mason says, almost as if he exasperated by the situation, "that's what you're here for right, settling everything, talking to them. I'll even pay for the pigs, let them see my phone, that might blow their minds." He sneers a little as if the idea of them touching anything of his is something he wishes to avoid.

"What are you trying to accomplish here," Will asks, eyes flicking up and down Mason's figure just once, "you know you're not going to win."

A flash of panic in Mason now, but he smothers it quickly, "I want to take the pigs, tell them I'm taking them, and we'll be fine."

Will doesn't need to look behind him to see how false that statement is, he can feel the anger radiating off the crowd, flooding through him. There are nervous tensions hanging thick in the air, but it's quieter. Everyone is watching, giving Will support as they can without stepping in. The rage bubbles through him, he can feel it lifting through his back.

"Drop the pigs and they might not kill you," Will says, and he can hear Jack's sharp intake of breath, "I can't save you if that's what they decide."

Mason looks ready to argue, he draws a breath and then his gaze flicks to the right, just once, before he visibly drops whatever he was thinking of. "Fine," he lets go of the poles and Will rushes to unleash the pigs, taking the cords away from their necks and watching as they cower under his feet before dashing into the crowd. "Fine, but it's on your head when we get back home, I'm not taking this lightly."

Mason turns on his heel and walks away. As he reaches the edge of the circle, Cordell greets him, a black backpack slung over one shoulder. They walk away together and Will breaths a sigh of relief. He trusts Hannibal to handle the crowd of people, he instead swings his head over to see Randall cradling a piglet in his hands, the other hiding between his feet. He's muttering something to them in low tones, Will can't tell if they're words or simply sounds.

"Will?" Bev asks gently as she approaches, "are you okay?"

"Just…angry," Will settles on, "I don't understand him. Why would he even attempt something like this?"

"Because he's insane, you haven't heard what he's being saying about this place at night," Bev sighs, "honestly, some of the things he says about you even, are just…I can't repeat

them."

"He doesn't like me, I can imagine the rest," Will looks at her right eyebrow, "I've been disliked before."

"Maybe," Bev allows, though it's clear she's doubtful about the extent of hate he's received in comparison to whatever Mason has been dispelling, "we'll need your help to pack up later, but maybe you should take a walk around first. Meet you after lunch?"

"After lunch," Will agrees easily, mind already somewhere else. Bev smiles at him just once, before she hurries after the group as they're leaving. Jack tries to catch Will's eyes, but he turns away before he can succeed. He slides through the crowd, feeling them part around him, and comes to a stop next to Hannibal.

He's reassuring the people around him, sending people off as they come to him, making sure that the group starts to thin. Eventually, there are only a few people left, people righting stalls and slowly wandering away for lunch. Some children ask Randall if they can pet the pigs, as gently as they can of course they reassure him, and he obliges.

Are you okay? Hannibal asks, and it takes a beat for Will to realise he's asking him.

Yes, Will assures, he scrubs a hand over his face in agitation, *Mason just doesn't understand basic human decency it seems.*

I could only pick up some of your conversation with him, I was distracted by the people, Hannibal says, *it appears he is abhorrent to everyone.*

He's a piece of work, that's for sure, Will sighs, *they want my help to pack, even if I'm not leaving with them. Can we lunch first, and then I'll help them get everything ready?*

Of course, Mosurre, Hannibal hums, *I can coach you through making an open savoury danish, though the dough will be different, with ham, lettuce and tomato perhaps. There may also be some cheeses.*

Will blinks, and then laughs, *a sandwich, you mean. You want to teach me how to make an open sandwich.*

Perhaps, if you do not burn it, Hannibal allows, and Will lets out another snort.

They do indeed have sandwiches for lunch, and Will does not burn any part of his. Hannibal piles fantastical things into his own, and Will only steals a few ingredients to try for himself. They eat it sitting in the steps of Hannibal's pyramid. Will surveys the land, wondering if this is the last time he'll have this view. The last time he'll see the stalls lining the streets, the people flitting between them, the buildings bracketing it all in. He also knows that he looks out of place, sitting on the stairs of a building there is a table in. Hannibal looks out of place with him, indulging Will by sitting on the dusty steps. Will knows that it is the furthest thing from what Hannibal would prefer, but he's glad he has someone to sit with.

When they finish the sandwiches Will sighs, but dusts off his knees and stands. *I should help them pack,* he says, *care to join me?*

I'll help if you need me to, Hannibal offers, and Will knows it's more than just the physical moving he's offering to help with. They make their way down to the rooms, where there's already a steady stream of the group moving things around.

"Hi, Will," Bev calls, smiling, "can you help me grab this bag? It's got the pots in it, please be careful." She points to a duffel with one hand, the other wrapped carefully around a folio.

"Sure," Will replies evenly and joins their party of moving things out into the forest, where the helicopter sits. It's closer than last time, as close as it could be without hitting a building. Hannibal joins the group of warriors already standing there, watching the group with keen eyes, though focused on the trouble makers. They relax as he approaches, eyes flicking over to Will as they settle.

Mason is standing there, near the entrance of the helicopter, fluffing around and ordering things to where they need to be. Will doesn't even glance at him and doesn't listen to him either when he tells him where to put the bag. He sets it down near the softer cloth bags, not wanting the pots to hit any of their electronics. He isn't sure which one would break first.

Will gently sets the bag down and moves some of the bags around it to make sure it isn't going to shift around. He takes a step back to make sure it stays and one of the bags sags, the zip coming undone. Will sighs as he reaches in to do it up again but freezes at the sight of a soft glint of light coming off something inside.

He unzips the bag further and feels frozen. There, nestled in the black fabric of some unbranded backpack is a shimmer of gold. Will reaches a hand in to move it around, to see the jewels in the fabric, the gold thread scattered throughout, the silver to highlight several areas. It's a ceremonial robe, he discovers as he gently removes it from the bag.

He sees the bloodstain right where it would rest against the ground, and Will sees red.

"Mason," Will yells, already storming forward. He grabs him by the front of his shirt, doesn't think of anything except for getting answers, "why do you have Hannibal's coat in the helicopter?"

"Because it's mine now," Mason scoffs, not scared of Will, "Hannibal can make a new one. I gave you the opportunity to get me one of my own, but you didn't take it."

"His soul is in there," Will argues back, "this isn't something replaceable."

Mason snorts, "his soul? You believe in their weird spiritual shit now, huh? You go stupid from being here too long?" He grins, "though that's not a new development is it?"

"This isn't about me," Will hisses and Mason laughs again.

"You sure about that?" He asks, "you got so attached to these savages, I mean, dating one of them? Honestly, they're basically animals-"

Will punches him square across the face, and blood spurts out his nose. There's a cry of surprise from the rest of the team, and sharp orders barked from the guards standing around the clearing. Will ignores them, focusing on grappling with Mason.

They fall to the ground as Mason flails at him, hitting his chin and making Will bite on his tongue. They roll for a second on the ground, Will gaining the upper hand easily, pure rage driving him forward. He's hitting Mason over and over again, though Mason is getting in a few of his own.

There's a gunshot, and Will lurches. Fire strikes up his cheek, and Will flinches away from it. He hears a scuffle behind him but the sound is muffled by Mason taking advantage of the distraction to roll them again. He only has the upper hand for a second while Will regains his footing. As soon as Will sees the glint of metal in the light he's bucking his hips, flipping them again. Pure adrenaline pushes him forward, he can't feel the pain anymore. He can feel the wound, yes, but it only spurs him on.

The knife clatters across the ground, and Will can see the fear overcome Mason's features. He bears down, again and again, wreaking havoc on Mason's face, until a hand lands on his shoulder.

He flinches, almost hits the intruder, when he realises that it's Hannibal.

He's done, Hannibal assures, and Will casts an eye over Mason.

He's still breathing, he rebuts, though Will expects without care that may not be the case for long. Mason is close to unconscious, blood covers his face.

Not for long, Hannibal murmurs darkly, *come on, let's get you attended to.* He swipes a finger gently across Will's face, and it comes away dark with blood. Will isn't so sure it's all his, Mason's face is a bloody enough mess that it probably got all over him.

He looks just behind Hannibal, and sees the rest of his group, in various stages of shock and fear. He also sees a body on the ground. It's Cordell, a gun in his hand and his head twisted at an unnatural angle.

Will can see it as clearly as if it was happening before his eyes. Cordell, aiming, shooting, Hannibal swooping in to direct the shot away from the back of Will's head. The simple steps he would have taken to snap Cordell's neck, efficient, bigger things to focus on instead of enjoying the kill. Bigger things like Will, he focused on Will before the joy of his kill.

Blood is covering Will's face, sprayed across his features and dripping from his cheek. He can feel it against his lashes, and yet it doesn't feel dirtying. He feels liberated, finally bathed, finally something more.

Will grabs Hannibal's head with his own bloodstained hands and smashes their lips together. He feels feathers and antlers under his fingers.

The beast kisses back.

Chapter End Notes

And we reach the main point! I hope you enjoyed my inability to write fight scenes. Also, hopefully things are clicking into place now, we are certainly wrapping everything up, and don't worry, Mason gets whats coming to him. More seriously, I hope you enjoyed this chapter, thank you for reading, and a massive thank you to the people who are continuously commenting (you guys make my day!), and I hope you have a great day!

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

A look into Ak Hannibal's mind

Chapter Notes

quick TW for Mason being a dick, as usual. Specifically in reference to Hannibal's intelligence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They move Mason to a cell, Hannibal instructs the guards to drag his unconscious body away, giving strict instructions he survives.

He has a higher purpose, he tells them, and they understand.

Will is out of it, clinging to Hannibal’s side. His face is practically bathed in blood, though they are both hesitant to wipe it off. He can feel the remnants of it against his lips, and as much as he revels in his beloved’s actions, the wound on his cheek is worrying. Will’s scars are always a thing of beauty to him, though the initial impact leaves him slightly breathless. Worried that this time will be the last time. At least until they meet again.

The scientists who came with him look nervous. They look horrified. Jack, the leader now that the others have been removed, looks particularly worried. Wounded even, like he’s been injured. He would reassure them, tell them to be off, but his priority is Will.

His priority is always Will.

He leads him away, back to his rooms. People on the street watch as they approach, looking with open curiosity.

What happened? someone asks from the crowd, Hannibal doesn’t bother finding out who. Will blinks at him, slow and sluggish, his energy drained.

Mason has committed a great crime, Hannibal explains, feeling Will sag gratefully against him, *he is imprisoned now for it. The rest of the visitors are innocent, however, they will be returning back to their homes shortly.*

He had your cloak, Will speaks up, softly, as the crowd departs, *he stole it while he pretended to take the pigs, he was planning this.* He can see Will clench his hands, the

wounds along his knuckles reopening.

A warmth blossoms across Hannibal's chest, Will protected him above all else. His attack was not provoked by an insult, a slight against him, but by his need to protect Hannibal, his soul. It was a righteous anger that flowed through him, and Hannibal wishes to see it again.

Let's get you inside, he says instead, *come, I will send someone to retrieve it.* He won't, he'll let it stay there until he can retrieve it himself. If he tells Will that though, he has no doubt that Will will insist that they go back and get it now, not leave it up to chance.

They walk together back up to the pyramid, Hannibal helping Will up the stairs and into the rooms. He bandages his knuckles, lays healing strips across the wounds. When he gets to his cheek Will leans into his touch, soft and hesitant, but Hannibal doesn't pull away. He cleans it as best he can, removing the blood though he only wishes to let it stay, and when everything looks neat again he lays Will down on the bed.

Where are you going? Will asks as he makes to leave, his adrenaline gone and his body already shutting down to rest.

I'm going to manage the crowd, Hannibal explains, *I won't be long. Rest, I'll bring food when I return.*

I'll be waiting here then, Will sighs, and he settles in.

Hannibal leaves, only doing so knowing that Will is safe, nothing and no one will be coming in to disturb him. He walks back down the street, answering questions as people ask them and reassuring them that Will is okay. A few of the warriors congratulate him, coming up to him and asking that he passes on their praise to Will. He will, he assures them, when he's finished with his tasks.

He strides down the path, glancing at stalls as he passes them. Contemplating their existence in his world. Eventually, he makes it to his destination, the prison cells. As before, they are almost completely barren, only the barest necessities. There a single prisoner, nestled against the back wall of the furthest cell, the seemingly endless rows before him only highlighting his isolation.

Hannibal is pleased to see that he has been tended to, but only in a minor way. His wounds are healed with rough hands, the bandages too tight or too loose. He can't know how much is due to the healers' disregard for Mason and how much is due to the man's probable struggling. He does not know which aspect would have been more enjoyable to watch unfold.

Mason stirs as Hannibal approaches, though when he sees who is there he simply rolls his eyes, disdain evident in his features.

"Good afternoon, Mason," Hannibal greets politely, and he enjoys watching Mason jump.

"Didn't realise you heard my name that often," Mason scoffs, "what, Will run you through the language or something?"

“He did indeed,” Hannibal admits, “I’ve greatly enjoyed learning the intricacies of the language Will grew up with. Alas, that is not what I am here to talk to you about.” He pulls a chair from by the wall, sitting on it and getting himself comfortable. Mason is worried now, eyes wide, like a rat caught in a trap. Hannibal is not ashamed to admit he enjoys it.

“Didn’t realise Will had been teaching you for so long,” Mason swallows, obviously uncomfortable, wondering about what else Hannibal understood.

“He hasn’t,” Hannibal tells him, “we only started a few nights ago. However, it is easy to pick up a language when you first learnt it at its birth,” Mason twitches, confusion settling over his features.

“What do you mean, you’re sixty at the most,” Mason splutters, “you believe English was invented when they arrived or something? I mean, I knew you guys were behind us in terms of technology.” Insulting again. Hannibal finds it terribly rude, even though he knows Mason is simply striking against the larger predator. He will fail of course, as effective as a feather against the power of the wind.

“No, I am simply older than the language itself.” Hannibal says, “Older than the planet, you should be grateful I took a shine to some of the people here. But no, what I wanted to talk to you about was your role in all this.”

“You’re insane,” Mason decides, “older than the planet. What is this place?”

“This is my little slice of the world, and perhaps to you I am insane, but you are insignificant. Already your sister’s wife has had a miracle, world-first pregnancy, she’s going to have a son. Your company and assets will fall into her hands, and you will be left with nothing, as you have always feared.” Hannibal smiles, “Well, not nothing. You will be a part of our rituals, as you had wished for.”

“What are you talking about?” Mason asks, though Hannibal knows he knows.

“You’ve committed a great crime, but there are still ways you can be part of something bigger, and better, than yourself,” Hannibal explains calmly, “Will will tear the flesh from your face, strip you of yourself, bare for everyone to see what you are underneath, and I will revel in watching him do so.” He leaves then, paying no heed to Mason’s explosion behind him. He doesn’t bother listening to the panicked yells, or the stilted begging, he cares about nothing more Mason has to say.

He strides back out, leaving Mason’s calls to echo behind him, and makes his way to the helicopter. The team of foreigners have cleared out, most likely going to hide in their rooms. It gives Hannibal the opportunity to take his cloak back undisturbed. He casts an eye over the bags already in the back of the machine and feels comforted to find that Will’s gear is not present. He hadn’t placed his own bag in there, still not sure about leaving evidently. Or, perhaps, he had made up his mind and simply not spoken it yet.

He removes his cloak from the backpack and places it gently over one arm as if it were a suit jacket. The faintest memory of Florence floats up at the action, Will waiting by the door, patiently playful. He holds it closely, brushing off any marks he can see, and then turns on his

heel, making his way back through the town. He makes it about halfway up the stairs to his rooms before he sees Abigail standing at the door, looking nervous. She straightens as he approaches, and embarrassed relief washes over her face.

Ak Hannibal, she greets, *I apologise, I didn't mean to bombard you,* her eyes skitter to the door before refocusing on him, *I just heard about the fight. I wanted to make sure Will was okay.*

I'm sure he would appreciate seeing you, Hannibal assures, pushing the door open, *please, sit, he's resting at the moment.* He leads her to the dining room, letting her sit at the table, a drink tray already ready for her to use. He's always had a soft spot for the girl, far past what he usually extends to his people. He blames it on Will.

She puts out three cups, pouring some of the drink in each, and placing them around the table. Hannibal excuses himself to the kitchen, and between one blink and the next, a tray of snacks appear. Hannibal would usually make it himself, he has always found joy in the creation of food, but there are too many things to handle right now to do so. He leaves it on the kitchen bench while he goes to wake Will.

Will is only dozing, eyes half-closed, staring out the window. Hannibal finds himself caught as the light dances off his lashes, he wonders, not for the first time, how Will could be only a mortal. Will, his beloved, turns to look at him, a small smile gracing his features.

Did you bring food? he asks, a smirk playing on his lips.

Hannibal finds himself smiling back, *I did indeed, and Abigail has visited.*

Oh, Will says, sitting up, *well we shouldn't keep her waiting.*

We shouldn't indeed, Hannibal murmurs, watching as Will stands. He pauses at the door, waiting for Hannibal to walk with him.

When Abigail sees them walk in, almost hand in hand, she hides a smirk behind her cup. Though, her eyes widen when she sees the bandage covering half of Will's face.

Oh, Will, she gasps, *oh I heard about the fight but no one said you got so injured.* She pushes herself out of the chair so she can get a closer look, *what happened?*

It's just a, a graze. The "bullet" missed me, Will assures her *just nicked me, Hannibal just worries.*

As he should, Abigail says, *the town would go crazy if you weren't attended to. I'm certain we'd have the Aknorra's head on a platter soon enough.*

Then it is good for both our sakes that I did indeed tend to Will's injuries, Hannibal interrupts gently, *please, sit, I'll have dinner out in a moment.*

They make their way to their chairs, and Hannibal quickly gets the finger food from before. He carries it out, a stack of plates hidden under it. He sits everything out, glad to see they've both left the head of the table to him.

It's a quiet meal, each picking at the tray of food, mostly forgoing their own plate. In any other circumstance, Hannibal would balk at the lack of table manners, but he feels blessed in a way to share the food with his closest. The sun sets, and no one notices when the candles light gently by themselves. Hannibal can't bear to get up, can't stand the thought of missing one moment of the gentle joy and comfort that fills the space.

The cups are overflowing, and the food seems never-ending. Will's face is lit almost ethereally in the flickering of the fire, and Abigail is laughing, her scar, her battles, emphasised in the low light.

Eventually, they retire to the couches, the conversation becomes deeper but somehow lighter. In the dark, soft whispers of dreams and desires are spilt on the ground like expensive wine, staining Hannibal's soul in shades of deep red. Hannibal promises them everything they can think of, from simple charms for lures or visits to far off places. He silently promises both them and himself a family, a never-ending source of happiness.

Abigail has to travel home as the moon nears its peak, and Hannibal sends her away with a bundle of food. Will hugs her, probably tipsy from the drinks, but full of love nonetheless. Abigail hugs back.

When it's just the two of them, they retire to Hannibal's room. No, their room. They lay down together, soft with love for one another, nothing held back.

Mosurre, Hannibal murmurs between gentle kisses, moving attention to Will's cheek, *I wish to ask you something.*

I'm pretty sure you can ask me anything you want, Will replies, breathless but with a smile, *considering how close we are, both literally and figuratively.*

I can always get closer, Hannibal offers with a smirk.

Will laughs, *I don't think either of us will be in the right state of mind for any questions then.*

You are very right, my darling, Hannibal says, brushing his lips gently against Will's cheek, silently willing them to heal without incident, *I wanted to ask if you would perhaps like to shed your shell of being a Tume.*

Will pauses, gently pushing Hannibal so they can look at each other properly, *wait, wait, you mean, become an Ulima?*

Yes, Hannibal nods.

Do the ritual, you mean?

We have a prisoner deserving of death, Hannibal murmurs, brushing his fingers through Will's hair.

I don't have a craft, Will argues.

You make wonderful fishing lures, my love, Hannibal hums, brushing his lips across Will's forehead.

I haven't done any of the teachings, Will huffs, though his eyes flutter at the motion.

I'm sure the people will overlook that, no one can deny you were halfway to completing the ritual this afternoon, Hannibal murmurs against his face.

You have an answer for everything, don't you? Will sighs.

I do indeed, call it foolish hope but I wished I would be able to see you complete it as soon as possible, Hannibal begins to pepper Will's face with gentle kisses, smiling when Will grabs him for a proper kiss.

After a few seconds Will pulls back, *what about the robe, doesn't it take a while to make?* When Hannibal's response was silence Will frowns, *Hannibal you didn't.*

I have been preparing for this since I first had you in my house, Hannibal admits, *there is a cloak already made, it only requires the finishing touches. It has always been a dear hope of mine.*

Will sighs, *I'm not getting out of this am I?*

If you truly do not wish to, I cannot force you, Hannibal admits, softly, forlornly. *I know you have not decided if you are going to stay, and I will not be the one to hold you back from wherever you wish to go.*

Hannibal you idiot, Will murmurs, holding Hannibal's face, *I would love to stay with you, I would be honoured to complete the ritual, I-* he breaks off, and kisses Hannibal with a desperation Hannibal matches in equal measure. Hands quickly start to wonder, and soon the only conversation exchanged is one filled with endearments and love.

They do not sleep much that night, revelling in the company of each other. When they do fall asleep, they are wrapped with each other, the candles go out without either of them lifting a hand. The blankets are dragged up, and they settle their heads together, like it would be painful to part.

Hannibal does not dream fully, only catching glimpses of past memories, and future hopes. Hannibal and Will sailing together towards war, the moments before a bloodbath in the colosseums, the time in peace where they stay together while a movie plays on the TV. The soft mourning of old age, the blind rage of a mangled body, the gentle quiet in the after, waiting until they meet again. His mind drags up, as it often does, the very first time he and Will met. He had been fond of walking through the town after his sister's death, watching the shimmering gold of the temples, stained with blood. The soft sunlight of the early afternoon, the dusty streets underfoot, the colours of humanity in its infancy.

The soft blue eyes making contact with his own in the centre of it all, the unshakeable certainty that this will be forever.

Chapter End Notes

....hehe...hi...I'm so sorry this took so long to get out. It has been sitting half finished for too long, and I finally had the energy to finish both this chapter and the final chapter. I'm actually in a place that has been in lockdown for the last few months, and in general my motivation has been lowered. But, thank you to everyone who has continued to encourage me through my unplanned hiatus, I have adored all your comments, I get emails about Kudos's and they've also been a massive encouragement. And my lovely readers, thank you too. There's only a chapter left, and then an epilogue, hopefully those come out over the next week. Thank you for being so patient, and I hope you enjoy and have a marvelous day!

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

whether happy, mournful, or full of blood, the end comes for everyone.

Chapter Notes

TW: blood, death, sad goodbyes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes first, surprisingly. His dreams had been mostly empty and bright, no dark force hanging just out of sight. The beast had stood next to him, walking with him through a myriad of places, some he couldn't name. It leaves him fuzzy, like he's remembering memories that aren't his.

He carefully extracts himself from the bed, having to gently remove Hannibal's hands twice, a soft smile on his face the whole time. He pads gently into the kitchen and takes a second to look around. He carefully opens up some of the draws, some of the cupboards. He roots around for something familiar, anything he can use to make breakfast. It's almost comical how quickly he gives up, he's used to shake pancake mixes at most, plain toast is his usual go-to.

That's how Hannibal finds him, hands on his hips and glaring at the kitchen like it's personally offended him.

What has the kitchen done this morning? Hannibal questions gently, pausing to kiss Will's cheek softly, tenderly. Will tilts his head just so to catch it.

It's being very unhelpful, Will frowns, *I wanted to make breakfast but unfortunately it appears the only way I can do that is if the kitchen magically makes it for me.*

Hannibal smiles, *unfortunately the kitchen only does that for me,* he opens the cupboards Will had rifled through and grabs some ingredients, *if you would like you can help me make breakfast, though it may not be as quick as the kitchen's magic.*

It'll taste better though, Will mutters, stationing himself at the regular spot. Hannibal holds his hands through it more than necessary, constantly coming up in Will's space to help, even if it isn't needed. Will finds it endearing. They make some kind of honey pastry, topped with chopped nuts. They eat it with their fingers, pulling it apart and chewing on bite-sized pieces.

It’s not too sweet for breakfast, surprisingly, though really Will shouldn’t be surprised with Hannibal’s cooking anymore.

After they eat, they get dressed in more presentable attire. There’s a pair of shoes available at the door in Will’s size, and Will puts them on with fondness. His boots have been moved back into the closet, magically, Will muses.

They lazily make their way back through the town, simply looking at things. Several people congratulate Will on his fight, there’s a respect that lingers in their eyes. However, when they near the rooms for the others, Will pauses.

I think I should talk to them alone, Will says softly, *who knows how Jack will blow up.*

Then I shall be here when you return, Hannibal replies, with no judgement or disappointment at all. *I wish you luck.*

I’ll need it, Will grimaces, and he approaches his crew.

The rooms are almost completely barren. Only a few necessities in each. He finds the group talking in hushed tones in Jack’s room as if scared of someone outside the window hearing what they’re saying. They stop when they see Will, descending into silence.

“Oh, Will,” Jimmy says awkwardly, “you feeling okay?” Brian shoots him a look and Jimmy shrugs helplessly.

“Yeah, the bullet just grazed me, thankfully,” Will replies, equally awkwardly, “I just wanted to talk about-“

“What the hell was that yesterday?” Jack demands, exploding, “you beat Mason half to death and then come back here like nothing happened?”

“He was stealing from them, I just got a little heated,” Will defends.

“A little heated?” Jack asks incredulously, “we don’t even know if he’s alive!”

“He’s alive, Jack,” Will feels like yelling back, but he forces himself to remain at least mostly calm. “and he’s staying here.”

“He’s not staying here!” Jack yells.

“You want to go up against the guards here?” Will asks, raising his voice too. He feels almost satisfied at Jack’s recoil, “you know what they have and you know what you have. It wouldn’t end well.”

“Are you threatening us?” Jack demands.

“No,” Will rebuts fiercely, “I’m saying there's no chance your getting Mason back, and do you really want him back?”

“He is a prick,” Brian shrugs, “I, for one, don’t want to get back on a helicopter with him.”

“Seconded,” Jimmy pipes up, “besides he’ll be a nightmare when we land.”

“They have a justice system, Jack,” Bev tries, “let them deal with him.”

Jack pauses, mulls it over, his principles bash against his common sense, but fortunately for them all, Jack is a sensible man above all else. “Fine, we’ll leave this afternoon then. Early morning at the latest. I can fly.”

“Actually, Jack,” Will interrupts, “that’s what I wanted to say. I’m staying. Here.”

“No you’re not,” Jack says, bewildered, before he strengthens himself and repeats; “no you’re not.”

“I am,” Will insists, “I’ve made a place for myself here, worst comes to worst I’ll trek back through the forest myself.”

“We’ll visit,” Bev promises, “Mason’s company falls to his sister right? I’m sure she’ll let us visit, there’s so much we haven’t seen, and you’ll be here.”

“We’ll bring your dogs,” Jimmy adds, before his smile falls into confusion, “I don’t know if we can, actually.”

“We’ll bribe someone,” Brian assures. Will is filled with warm affection for them, this is his team, and though he wishes to stay, he knows he will miss them.

Jack seems to sense the team is turning toward Will’s side and he sighs. “You better have more information when we next visit,” he threatens gently.

“I will,” Will promises, “as long as you visit.”

“Oh, as if we’d leave you all alone,” Bev teases, “invite me to your wedding though if I’m not your maid of honour I will throw a drunken fit.”

“You kidding?” Brain asks, “his whole wedding party will be dogs.”

“I’ll invite you,” Will promises, cutting any argument short, “I’ll make an invitation and everything.”

“You better,” Bev threatens softly, “I really want to hug you.”

Will pauses, looks at them, “once,” he allows, catching Bev in his arms as she leaps forward. Brian and Jimmy quickly pile on too, Jack even reaching over to pat his back. He hasn’t been touched by so many people in a long time, but he has to admit it feels good.

That afternoon he helps them load up the helicopter. All the things missed from yesterday, all the essentials they left in their rooms. Their departure is delayed as people keep coming up and giving them things, more small trinkets, pots, necklaces, so much so that they joke the helicopter won’t take off. Then they get emotional, saying goodbye to everyone, thanking them for their hospitality. They manage to sneak one more group hug from Will, dog piling on him, and this time there are definitely a few tears.

Will has to corral the crowd back, everyone wanting to crowd the helicopter as it takes off, but fortunately, no one is hurt. Jack settles into the pilot seat, thankfully he truly does know how to fly, and he takes off with a wave towards the crowd. Will waves back as his team leaves. The crowd remains there for a while, slowly dispersing with time. First the ones near the back, then those with young children, those with stalls. The last to leave are the guards, who take a second but leave at Hannibal's subtle nod. Soon it is just Hannibal and Will, standing there in the middle of an empty clearing. Winston stays with them, curled up on the ground, watching with just as heavy a heart. Will eventually tears his eyes away from the empty sky as the sun dips below the horizon, wiping slight tears from his eyes, and Hannibal helps lead him back towards the town.

As they near, the sounds of people talking and laughing floats through the forest, though its source is hidden until they reach the town centre. There, Will finds a festival, not unlike when he first arrived. He blinks in surprise at the lights and food set out.*What's this for?* Will asks Hannibal, half turning his head.

A celebration, Hannibal answers, *mourning the loss of your friends, rejoicing your decision to stay. Both and neither.*

Any opportunity to celebrate, I guess? Will mutters, *they'll miss my team that much?*

Of course, Hannibal answers, *for someone so perceptive you are unaware how much others care for you, and the people around you. They adored your team, they adore you.*

Oh, Will breathes, a little overwhelmed. Hannibal gives him a second before gently taking his hand and leading him through the festivities. People cheer as he enters, drinks raised and shouts of joy. Someone tries to slip a necklace over his head but he ducks away, and instead, they place it in his hand. Someone brings over a tray of drinks, and Will readily grabs one. He chugs it in one go, and the next necklace is placed successfully over his head. He feels lost in the festivities, moving from one food tray to the next, everything is simple finger food, a tiny bite that melts on your tongue and leaves you both satisfied and needing more. He can see the table set up, so he doesn't gorge himself yet.

The candles flicker as it grows darker, and when the street is only lit from the fire and the sparkles of jewellery, everyone makes their way to the table. They come in staggered groups, people staggering over when they've had enough of standing. Will gravitates to the lower side of the table, assuming he can't join the Ulima at the raised seats. He assumes wrong, as Hannibal drags him up to the higher side, seating him at his side. The crowd claps as he sits down, no one raises a complaint.

When everyone settles, Hannibal stands. *We come together to celebrate our time with the visitors, to mourn their passing, and to look towards when we meet again,* he raises his glass and a cheer rises up. When it settles he lowers it again, *and, we celebrate the stay of my Mosurre, Will, who will live with us.* A louder cheer rises, even before Hannibal lifts his glass, one that goes for longer too.

To Mosurre! Abigail shouts above the din, sitting on Hannibal's other side.

To Mosurre! the crowd repeats in a cheer.

To Aknorra! Abigail shouts again.

To Aknorra! the crowd echoes.

To forever! Hannibal roars above it all.

Forever! the crowd calls, before falling into a chaos of cheers and noise. Food comes out in platters, and everyone scrambles to fill their plates. Someone puts something on Will's head, a twisted crown of antlers. He's somewhat amused to see a similar one sitting on Hannibal's head, both a deep red that's almost black. They eat together, and in the flickering light the chaos reigns around them. Will feels lifted by the emotions, heightened by the joy. He continues to get showered in gifts, though to his amusement, Hannibal does too.

At some point Patti unveils a sculpture for them, Hannibal and Will huddled together around Abigail and a dog, probably Winston, who had spent the night cleaning plates off the floor. Will would readily admit he fed Winston some bites out of his hands. He recognises the sculpture as the unfinished one on Patti's stall floor, that long time ago. He wonders just how long Hannibal had been planning this.

They party well into the night, and when Hannibal and Will stagger home they collapse in each other's arms.

———

It's not long after that Will finds himself at the top of the pyramid. Blood red face paint covers his skin, a line across his cheek where the bullet had grazed him, highlighting his battles. He can still feel the phantom touches of Hannibal's fingers lovingly tracing lines across his face, a soft private moment between them.

The robe sits heavily across his shoulders, gold glittering in the light. He had indeed been allowed to make his own additions, dark rubies, pearls, glittering shards of glass. And there, just near his heart, a tiny pendant of a dog tucking its nose into its belly. There's even a diamond from Hannibal's own cloak, an offering he had made to Will's becoming.

He feels ethereal standing at the top of the pyramid, Hannibal by his side. He feels like a god, all-powerful. The sun looks down fondly, highlighting his curls in an unruly halo of light, his robe scattering the light across the ground, making him almost hard to look at. Something truly made of myth.

Mason is brought up to him, and he feels satisfaction in watching him struggle, watching the fear in his eyes. Mason tries to speak but he's already gagged, instead, all Will hears are muffled curses. They both know how this is going to end.

Hannibal gently hands Will a knife, curved and wicked at the end. It feels comfortable in his hand, like he's held it before. The leather feels familiar, the curve like a friend, a companion. He curls his fingers around it, Hannibal grasping his hand as well. Together they lift the knife to the sky. A roar rises from the crowd below, a cheer that Will barely hears. All he can process is the steady drumbeat of blood in his ears, pushing him forward.

Hannibal lets go of the knife at the top, letting Will take the downswing. Will looks at Mason, uses his free hand to hold his head back, and bears down with a force that slices his neck cleanly open.

As blood pours out of the wound, Will feels himself transform, gaining insight into himself. He can feel the cocoon giving way, his ascension drenched in blood. He can almost feel the wings sprout from his back, allowing him to truly leave behind his old life.

He bears down, Hannibal at his side, and together they cut open Mason's chest. He rips the heart free, almost frantically, and takes a bite. As he swallows, he offers it to Hannibal, who takes a bite while it still rests in Will's hands, warm and oozing.

Below, the people are scooping up bowls of blood, and up top is no different. Hannibal scoops some into a bowl and holds it against Will's lips. He drinks greedily, like he's been without sustenance his whole life. And in a way, he has, he has been without this his whole life.

The bowl is pulled away for Hannibal to take a mouthful, and Will pounces, knocking the bowl to the ground in a clatter. Atop the pyramid, they kiss deeply, both reborn as something newer, something better. The crowd cheers below them, laughing, yelling, drinking to their heart's content. Blood pours around them, between them, but they are more liberated than they have ever been.

Will knows something has clicked into place within him, something locked has been freed. It's better than anything he's ever experienced.

When they break, Will grins, blood-stained teeth bared. Hannibal smiles back. They tip their heads back as one and roar into the sky. And they know, in their souls, that this is it. This is them.

Aknorra and Mosurre, forever.

Chapter End Notes

> Hey everyone! Welcome to the bittersweet ending for this amazing project. I know it's short, I don't want you to think I rushed to the end, in fact it was quite the opposite. I'll have a more thorough end sign off at the epilogue, but thank you so much for reading, especially those who comment and kudos, and I hope you have a wonderful day.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A look at the survivors on the other side

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beverly is shaking. Like a leaf in a storm or some similarly poetic nonsense, she's heartbroken. Devastated. Destroyed. It feels like such an odd emotion in the strangely clinical space she's in, modern walls and floors splashed with tears. It shouldn't affect her so much, just relaying the events of the past few weeks and going over everything in her head, but it does.

Margot comes up to her, a coffee in each hand, and gently hands one over.

"Thanks," Bev sighs, taking a sip and not feeling it on her tongue.

"No problem," Margot replies, taking a seat beside her, "how are you holding up?"

"Terribly," Bev admits, "it's just … hard."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Margot asks, "I've got nowhere to be."

"It was all gone," Bev finds herself admitting, "we went back and there was nothing there. We looked everywhere, we compared it with the limited photos we had and the landscape was the same, but there were no buildings, no graves, not a single remnant. There wasn't even a clearing." She sighs, "all we found was Peter's grave, the cross under the tree. Thank you, by the way, for allowing us to take him back home to bury, even though all that was left were bones."

"He should rest where he lived, where his home is," Margot explains, shrugging. "What about the rest of your research?"

"Missing," Bev sighs, "Everything we gathered got lost somewhere in transport, we can't find it anywhere. Most, if not all of our electronic copies became corrupted, and a lot of our physical notes disappeared into thin air. I had photographs of a pot in my bag, and when we landed I couldn't find them." Bev clenches her hands together in frustration and then soothes herself. "Even my memories are fuzzy. Like looking at a dream. We're trying not to lose our minds, but the only physical evidence we have of even leaving is the glass trinkets, and we're terrified we'll wake up to find them gone."

"I'm sorry about the mix-ups," Margot offers, "I've sent some people to look for them but we're not hopeful." She gently pats Bev's hand, "maybe it's best if we just forget about the whole thing?"

"I don't want to forget about it though! I don't want to lose that time, especially if that means losing Will and Peter too," she almost shakes apart in her grief, "I just hope he's okay."

"From everything you've told me, I think he's okay." She sends a sympathetic smile, and Bev smiles weakly back.

Alana walks up to them both, her belly jutted out in front of her, close to giving birth. Margot stands to greet her, and they bend their heads together to talk quietly.

"What happened?" Bev asks as both their faces turn sombre.

"Will's dogs ran away," Alana says, "and his house was robbed. They took almost everything, there isn't much left."

"Oh," Bev breathes, burying her face in her hand, feeling tears prick at her eyes.

"I'm a psychologist, if you need any help," Alana tells her, "this is terribly hard, I can imagine. Please, call me if you need anything." She hands out a business card with her details printed neatly on it.

"Thank you," Bev tells her, emerging from behind her fingers to take it, "for the help, both financially and now mentally."

"Just fixing my brother's mistakes," Margot says, patting her shoulder. "It's been a tough day, I think you should head home."

"You're probably right," Bev sighs, "I'll catch up with you guys later."

Alana and Margot wave her goodbye, watching with warm smiles until she leaves their field of view.

"What's the update?" Margot asks under her breath.

"One of ours found Will and Hannibal in Venice. Couldn't get a photo, but are sure it's them. They were with a younger girl as well. What do you want to do?" Alana crosses her arms gently, looking over at her wife.

"Drop it, I think," Margot says, "From what they told us there's no way Mason is still alive, and I don't think following up will do us any good." She casts a look at Alana's stomach, laying a gentle hand on it, "I don't particularly feel like getting on Hannibal's radar."

"No," Alana agrees, "any other loose ends?"

"Not that I can find. Everything is gone, and Mason appears to have simply stumbled across the knowledge in the first place," she shrugs, "No one left to sign non-disclosures, nothing to

bury under paperwork, even Mason's barns have burned down. This whole thing has tied itself up, and I suspect that in a few weeks the scientists will have been sorted for us."

"Then we'll let it lie," Alana says, nodding.

"We'll let it lie."

Chapter End Notes

And so we reach the end. I know it's not the happiest ending but a bitter-sweet one at least. Thank you so much to everyone who has read, kudos, bookmarked or subscribed to this journey, I'm really appreciative. And to those who commented, once, twice, or on every chapter, you are the highlights of my days, absolutely amazing and I hope you continue to bring joy to authors like me. This is probably the most emotional I've been to finish a fic, so far, I truly adore this world and I may come back to it. But for now, this is goodbye. Thank you so much for reading, and I hope you have a lovely day!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!